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ABSTRACT

This book introduces students to the people and country of Thailand. This ancient and historic land is filled with beauty, diversity, and wonder. This book provides background information and suggested topics for an intensive study of the country. The seven chapters are entitled: (1) "The Land"; (2) "The People"; (3) "Early History"; (4) "Ayutthaya"; (5) "Thonburi and the Early Bangkok Period"; (6) "The Emergence of Modern Thailand"; (7) "The Post-War Period"; (8) "Arts and Crafts"; (9) "Aspects of Thai Culture"; (10) "Religion"; (11) "The Economy"; (12) "The Government"; and (13) "Thai Teenagers." Tables, diagrams, graphs, and maps illustrate the text. A 67-item glossary, bibliography, resource list, and answer key conclude the book. (BT)

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Thailand:
Land of Contrasts

by Titima Suthiwan and Uri Tadmor

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Center for Southeast Asian Studies

School of Hawaiian, Asian and Pacific Studies

University of Hawai'i

1997

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THAILAND:

Land Of Contrasts

A Workbook for High School classes

by Titima Suthiwan and Uri Tadmor

with illustrations by Ann Hsu

Partially funded by the Henry Luce Foundation

Center for Southeast Asian Studies
School of Hawaiian, Asian and Pacific Studies
University of Hawaii
Honolulu, Hawaii
1997

A word to the student

Imagine you are in a Buddhist temple. Inside, monks dressed in yellow robes are chanting their ancient prayers, completely detached from the cares of every-day life. People come to offer the monks flowers, candles, and incense, and then kneel on the floor in solemn meditation. The atmosphere is peaceful, serene, and holy. Yet outside in the temple yard, a noisy fair is going on. Thousands of people are buying and selling anything from magazines, to jewelry, to children's clothes. Loud music, both Thai and Western, is blasting through loudspeakers, and the smoke of chicken and pork roasting over open fire blends with the scent of incense coming from within the temple.

Imagine you are inside a fabulously fancy house. The floors are all marble, windows are hung with luxuriant silk curtains, and in the spacious garden guests mingle among exquisite pavilions and water fountains. All about there are servants, busy serving rare delicacies and cocktails. Yet on the other side of the street is a huddle of ramshackle little huts, built out of pieces of wood, plastic, and corrugated iron patched together. The huts have no running water, so the inhabitants use a nearby canal as a bathroom. Oblivious to the stench and the flies, a group of naked children is joyfully playing in the canal, and splashing the polluted water on each other.

Imagine you are in a jungle. The trees are so dense and tall that the sunshine hardly penetrates them. Exotic birds and butterflies in a dazzling array of colors are fluttering about. Rare monkeys, wild elephants, and tigers come to quench their thirst at a cool mountain stream which cuts through the jungle. Yet just a few miles away, the landscape is as desolate and barren as a desert. Gone are the trees, felled by greedy businessmen, and gone too are the lush undergrowth and abundant wildlife.

Welcome to Thailand, land of contrasts. In the following pages, you will be taken on a tour of one of the most fascinating countries in the world. It is a country of incredible natural beauty, kind and charming people, a long and awe-inspiring history, and a rich and diverse culture. Yet, like other countries, it also has its share of social and environmental problems. All aspects, negative as well as positive, will be treated in the book.

We tried to make this book as interesting as possible for you. While we don't expect you to actually enjoy it, we hope that at least you won't find it a deathly bore. And if you will have learned something about Thailand in the meantime, we will consider our purpose in writing it as having been achieved.

Titima Suthiwan and Uri Tadmor

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Unit 1: The Land

Geography

Thailand is a large country, covering over 500,000 square kilometers (about 200,000 square miles). In fact, it is one of the largest countries in Southeast Asia, second only to Indonesia. However, compared to the United States, Thailand is rather small: it would fit into the U.S. more than 18 times.

Located in the heart of mainland Southeast Asia, Thailand has common borders with Myanmar(Burma) on the east, Laos on the north and northeast, Cambodia on the southeast, and Malaysia on the south. Its central and southern regions also border on the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Sea. Although minor border disputes between Thailand and its neighbors arise periodically, generally speaking its borders have been stable since the late 1940s.

The shape of the country is rather unusual. Westerners have described it as having the form of an elephant's head, although to Thais it looks more like an axe. It consists of a large mass of land (the "elephant head" or "axe blade") consisting of most of the country, with a narrow strip (the "trunk" or "handle") extending down into the Malay Peninsula.

Thailand's four regions

Thailand is divided into four regions: the north, the northeast, the central plains, and the south. Although the divisions are natural, and based on topographical features such as mountains and rivers, each region has developed its own distinct cultural and linguistic characteristics. The "head" of the elephant consists of the largest and most populous regions: the north, the northeast, and the central plains, which actually extends a little down into the "trunk". The remainder of the "trunk" consists of the south. In official publications, there is sometimes a reference to an Eastern Region and a Western region as well. Actually, these form a part of the Central region, and have been artificially removed from it for statistical purposes.

The north

The northern region of Thailand is comprised of mountains and valleys in which mighty rivers flow. Most of the mountainous area is covered with dense forests; the valley beds are cultivated. Temperatures in the north can be quite low seasonally, cool enough to grow some fruits which cannot be grown in other parts of tropical

Thailand, such as lychees, apples, and strawberries. There are also some tea plantations in this region.

The biggest city in the north is Chiang Mai. Despite being Thailand's second largest city, its population of about 200,000 is only about one fortieth that of Bangkok.

Chiang Mai is located in a broad valley, along both banks of the river Ping. Until quite recently, it was a sleepy town of low-lying buildings, many of them wooden, and the skyline was dominated by the spires and pagodas of its many temples. Development, however, is rapidly changing the character and the appearance of the city. Large hotels, condominiums, and office buildings have been built in the city center, while the surrounding countryside is quickly being transformed into residential areas.

Chiang Mai is famous for its many beautiful temples, which can be seen virtually in every part of the city. Some of them are rare ancient wooden structures, covered with exquisite carvings. Most other old wooden temples in Thailand have succumbed to the ravages of the weather, termites, fires, or simply time. Other temples are built of plastered bricks.

Chiang Mai is known throughout Thailand as an arts and crafts center. In addition to the many factories and workshops located in the city itself, people from the surrounding countryside also bring in their handicrafts to be sold there. The most important products are silverware, silk, lacquerware, paper umbrellas, and teakwood products.

Other important towns in the north are Lamphun, also noted for its ancient temples, and Lamapang, where there is a training school for elephants.

The northernmost region of Thailand is part of an area known as the Golden Triangle. It forms a triangle between Myanmar on the west, Laos on the east, and Thailand on the south. The Golden Triangle is one of the largest opium-producing areas in the world. The Thai government is now trying to get the local people to stop growing the poppies from which opium is produced. This is done through a crop-substitution program: government officials give the farmers seeds or plants of various crops, and teach them how to grow them. But since growing opium is more profitable than any other crop that can be grown in the mountains, the program has not been altogether successful.

The northeast

Thailand's northeast consists mostly of the Khorat Plateau (a plateau is a fairly flat, elevated expanse of land; Khorat is an important city after which the plateau is named.) This region is arid and its soil is not very fertile. The inhabitants grow rice, mostly of a variety known as glutinous (sticky) rice, as well as cassava, a plant with a starchy edible root. The most important river for the northeast is the Mekong River, which forms a natural border between Thailand and Laos; it is the longest river in Southeast Asia.

Although the region is densely populated, there are no large cities in the northeast. The great majority of the people are farmers who live in villages. The largest towns are Khon Kaen, Khorat (Nakorn Ratchasima), Ubon Ratchathani, and Udon Thani, each of which has a population of between 100,000 and 200,000. Most of the inhabitants of these cities are employed in factories that manufacture fabrics, building materials, and foodstuffs.

Some of Thailand's most important archeological sites are located in the northeast. Ban Chiang, where the oldest civilization in southeast Asia was discovered, is located in Udon Thani Province. Other sites include the impressive mountaintop castle of Phanom Rung and the temple compound of Phimai. Both were built about one thousand years ago by the Cambodians, who then controlled this area. The structures are built of massive stones weighing up to several tons, each of which were quarried in other regions and then transported to their present location. Modern scientists still do not know how this was done. The roofs and gables of the buildings are decorated with minute stone carvings, many of which have survived down to our time.

The central plains

The central plains region consist of a fertile plain, through which flows Thailand's most important river, the Chao Phrya River. Most of Thailand's rice, the Thai staple (basic food) as well as the most important agricultural export, is grown here. This is why the Chao Phrya basin has been called "the rice bowl of Asia". The fertile soil and the plentiful water enable the fields to yield more than one crop per year.

The most important city in central Thailand is of course Bangkok, the capital. However, Bangkok has developed a character quite of its own, which has little in common with the mostly rural central plains. Its population, too, is not representative of the center; in fact, central Thais are probably outnumbered in Bangkok by ethnic Laos from the northeast and ethnic Chinese.

About 80 km (50 miles) north of Bangkok is Ayutthaya, Thailand's former capital. A large and prosperous capital for over four centuries, the city was captured and destroyed by the Burmese in 1767. The capital was never rebuilt, because its position was not very easy to defend.

In its heyday, Ayutthaya was described by travelers as one of the most beautiful cities of the East. Today, it is still in ruins, except for a small modern market town that has grown near the ancient city. Impressive remains of temples, palaces, and pagodas are still scattered over a very large area. With a little bit of imagination, the modern visitor can picture merchant ships from all over the world sailing up the river past bustling markets, splendid palaces, and glittering temples.

Further north of Ayutthaya lies the town of Lopburi. It has been an important town since the Cambodians controlled the region a thousand years ago. During the Ayutthaya period, it served as the country's summer capital. The remains of the summer palace of King Narai the Great can still be seen today, alongside the mansion of his Greek prime minister, Konstantin Phaulkon. The town is also famous for its large population of monkeys.

DID YOU KNOW? There is a wealthy businessman in Lopburi, who attributes his good fortune to the town's monkeys. Every year, he rents a large open-air restaurant, and invites the monkeys to a ten-course banquet. The event now draws many spectators from all over Thailand.

West of Bangkok, in the town of Nakhon Pathom, stands the tallest Buddhist monument in the world. It is a *chedi* (bell-shaped pagoda) built on the site of what was believed to be the oldest *chedi* in Thailand. Standing 127 meters (387 feet) tall, the height of a forty-story building, it can be seen from many miles away.

Further west is the jungle-covered province of Kanchanaburi. During World War II, the Japanese used large numbers of Asian as well as Western slave laborers to build a railway to Burma through this province. The most infamous part of the railway was the Bridge on the River Kwai, whose story was later featured in a successful

movie. It is estimated that over 100,000 of the slave laborers perished from diseases, exhaustion, and mistreatment during the construction of the railway.

The resort city of Pattaya is situated on the Gulf of Thailand southeast of Bangkok, in the province of Chonburi. Until the 1970s, it was a sleepy town where well-to-do Bangkokians owned vacation homes where they could escape the hustle and bustle of the city. During the 1980s large numbers of foreign as well as local tourists started flocking to Patthaya, and many high-rise hotels were built to accommodate them. Soon Pattaya became the largest resort in Thailand, and one of the most important ones in the whole region. Today, tourists keep coming to Pattaya, though in smaller numbers: the beaches have become crowded, the beaches and water are polluted, and traffic congestion is almost as bad as Bangkok's.

Bangkok

Bangkok, Thailand's capital, is located in the heart of the central plains. In many ways, it is the country's only real city; other towns are essentially just small provincial market towns.

Bangkok is a huge sprawling city, with an official population of about six million inhabitants. However, when unregistered migrants and temporary residents are taken into consideration, the actual figure probably comes closer to ten million. Since the great majority of buildings in Bangkok are low-rise single family houses and townhouses, the city also covers an enormous geographical area.

In some respects, Bangkok resembles any large metropolis: busy streets, shopping centers, offices and hotels. But in many ways it is unique. How many other cities have two thousand glittering temples? Or a mayor who sleeps on the floor and eats only ten spoons of rice a day? Or traffic jams so monumental it can take three hours to cover a distance of ten miles?

Bangkok owes its development to King Rama I, who established his capital there. Before then, it was just a small town, known for its wild olives (Bangkok means "wild olive town" in Thai). In 1782, Rama I decided the town's location was ideal to build the country's new capital: located inside a bend in Chao Phraya River, it had natural protection, abundant fresh water sources, and accessibility to both the interior of the country and the Gulf of Thailand. The king initiated the construction of palaces and temples, built to imitate as closely as possible the magnificent buildings of the former capital Ayutthaya.

Initially, the only means of transportation in the city was the river. Soon, canals were dug, leading inland from the river, and more neighborhoods were built along them to house the growing population of civil servants, soldiers, merchants, and ordinary citizens.

A Chinese community had already existed in Bangkok prior to its becoming the capital; in fact, it occupied the area where the royal palace and temple were built. Rama I asked the Chinese inhabitants to move away from that location, which was the most strategic one in town, to an area called Sampheng, which has been a Chinese area ever since.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the city underwent extensive modernization. The first road was built, later to be followed by others. Some streets were paved along canals, and some canals were filled in altogether in order to build roads in their place. Modern inventions, such as the telegraph and electric lights, were quickly adopted by the city. A system of trams supplemented boats as public transport. Wide avenues and boulevards were built, lined with Western-style buildings.

However, the biggest push for development came after World War II, and accelerated in the 1970s and 1980s. The *prang* (corn-shaped pagoda) of the Temple of Dawn, long the tallest structure in Bangkok, has now become dwarfed by the hundreds of high-rise buildings sprouting all over the city. Remaining open areas in the metropolitan area (as well as adjacent areas of other provinces) are quickly being turned into housing estates. Old rowhouses are being razed to make way for modern condominiums and office buildings.

This rapid development has brought about numerous problems, mostly because of the lack of urban planning. The major motive behind the development is the developers' desire to make quick profits. Safety regulations are ignored, and the city infrastructure, already overburdened, is cracking under the pressure. City streets, already too narrow and insufficient in numbers, are now clogged with traffic almost

around the clock. Clean water sources are not enough to supply the needs of millions of people, and shortages are becoming commonplace. Air pollution has reached such proportions that Bangkok now rivals Mexico City in having the lowest air quality in the world.

Despite its many problems, Bangkok remains one of the world's most fascinating cities. This is why it draws millions of visitors from all over the world every year--and their numbers keep growing.

DID YOU KNOW? The Thai name for the city of Bangkok is *Krungthepmahanakhon Amonrattanakosin Mahintharayutthayamahadilok Phopnoppharatratcha-thaniburirom Udomrathcaniwetmahasathan Amonphimanawatansathit Sakkatthatiyawitsanukamprasit*, which means "City of angels, great city, immortal jewel of Great Indra's Ayutthaya, land of the blissful nine-jewelled capital, with abundant palaces, immortal palace where Brahma's incarnation dwells, built by Vishnukarma (the god of engineering)." In order to save time, however, most Thais prefer to use the abbreviated form *Krungthep*. They only use the name "Bangkok" when speaking to foreigners.

Temples and Palaces

The first place most visitors to Bangkok head for is the compound of the Grand Palace and the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. It covers over fifty acres, and includes chapels, palaces, royal reception halls, pagodas, and statues, decorated with gold leaf and glittering colored glass mosaics. Many consider it to be the most beautiful palace in the world.

The temple portion of the compound is different from other temples in that it has no resident monks. When the temple was built, it was still forbidden for any males who were not members of the royal family to reside within the royal compound. The central building is the Royal Chapel, a large hall housing the Emerald Buddha. Actually, this title is a mistranslation of the Thai name: the statue is not made of emerald, but rather carved out of jade. It sits upon a magnificent golden chariot. Beneath it are two standing Buddhas, erected by King Rama III in honor of his father Rama II and his grandfather Rama III. So famous have these statues become that Thais now refer to the two kings by the names of the statues built in their memory: Phra Phutthayotfa and Phra Phutthaloetla.

Within the temple grounds are several other buildings of royal and religious significance. The tallest is a large *chedi*, completely covered with gold leaf and glass, which was built by King Rama IV. There is also a library, a small chapel housing the

statues of the past kings of the Chakri dynasty, and another one housing their ashes (all were cremated, in accordance with Buddhist tradition). In the little space left between the buildings stand statues of mythical figures: giants, *kinnaris* (half bird--half human creatures), *garudas* (legendary birds), and *nagas* (seven-headed serpents).

DID YOU KNOW? The grounds of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha are surrounded by a covered gallery, inside which is one of the world's longest murals. The mural (wall painting) depicts the tales of Rama, the Indian god-king. The text appears on the columns. The paintings have been repeatedly retouched and repaired, until little is left today of the originals, but they are still considered to be among the finest examples of Thai painting.

Next to the temple grounds lies the compound of the Grand Palace. Today the royal family no longer lives here, and the buildings are used as offices and reception halls. Some of these halls date back to the first reigns of the Chakri dynasty, and are built in pure Thai style. Others are completely Western in architecture. The main building is a strange combination of East and West. King Rama V had this building, called *Chakri Maha Prasat*, designed by a European architect, and indeed its lower part looks like it would fit very well in London or Paris. However, the roof is completely Thai, with several tiers of glazed tiles, gables with upwards-pointing hooks, and tall crown-like pagodas (*mongkuts*). Many have criticized the strange appearance of the building, but no one dares make changes in a palace built by a revered monarch.

The Grand Palace and Temple of the Emerald Buddha are located next to Sanam Luang Plaza, a huge oval-shaped open field. In the past it was the site of Bangkok's weekend market, which has since moved to a new location on the outskirts of the city. Because it is easily accessible and can accommodate hundreds of thousands of people, the plaza is the favored location for public gatherings and demonstrations. For instance, the demonstrations leading to the collapse of the military dictatorship in 1992 started there. Sanam Luang Plaza is also used for holding kite-flying competitions and royal funerals.

DID YOU KNOW? According to a legend, during the reign of King Rama III the Vietnamese army was planning to lay siege to Bangkok. The king found out about their plan, and ordered the vast Sanam Luang Plaza planted with rice. The Vietnamese realized that the population of the city could now hold on indefinitely under siege, and gave up their plans.

Also located on Sanam Luang Plaza is the National Museum. It is housed in a former palace, to which many other buildings have now been added. The museum houses an extensive collection of artifacts pertaining to Thai art and history, including the King Ramkhamhaeng inscription, the earliest Thai inscription, which dates back to the end of the thirteenth century.

On the other side of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha is another important temple, called *Wat Po*. It is the home of Thailand's largest reclining Buddha image. This statue, which is 140 feet long and 45 feet tall at its highest spot. Just the statue's feet alone are 17 feet high. The soles are covered with delicate mother-of-pearl inlay.

Thais sometimes call Wat Po "the oldest open university". This is because King Rama III, wishing to preserve traditional Thai sciences for future generations, had the galleries of the temple covered with various scientific and literary texts, so that any interested person could come and study them. In the courtyard of the temple there are statues depicting various yoga positions, again built for educational purposes.

In addition to Wat Po and the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, Bangkok has thousands of other temples, many of them of great historical and artistic as well as religious significance.

The ancient Temple of Dawn is built on the right bank of the Chao Phraya River, in the former city of Thonburi, which is now incorporated into Bangkok. When Thonburi was the capital city of Thailand, right before Bangkok, the Temple of Dawn served as the royal chapel. The central *prang* is 76 meters (232 feet) tall, and for over a century it was the tallest structure in Bangkok.

DID YOU KNOW? During the reign of King Rama III, the Temple of Dawn was decorated with mosaics of colored porcelain. At one point, the artisans ran out of porcelain, and the king had to ask his subjects to contribute bowls and plates from their own households. These were broken into small round pieces, and the work could then be completed. Today visitors may climb on the *prang* and see that the mosaics are made with bits and pieces of Chinese, Japanese, and even European dinnerware, in addition to porcelain pieces made especially for that purpose.

The impressive Marble Temple was built by King Rama V in 1900. As its name implies, it is built of marble--imported Italian marble. The King had it commissioned after having visited Europe, and consequently it is a tasteful combination of Thai and European styles. Like European chapels, it is cross-shaped, and has stained glass windows. Like traditional Thai temples, it has a multi-tiered, gabled roof, and

contains an impressive Buddha image. In the galleries which surround the temple is a large collection of Buddha statues of all styles and periods.

DID YOU KNOW? The architect of the Marble Temple was one of King Rama V's brothers. He was not satisfied with his plans, and wanted to shelve them. The king, however, insisted on seeing the plans, and then ordered them carried out. Today many consider the Marble Temple to be the most beautiful building in Thailand.

Another interesting temple is known as the Golden Mountain. King Rama I started its construction as a replica of a gigantic *chedi* (bell-shaped pagoda) in the former capital of Ayutthaya which bears the same name. Unfortunately, the earth in Bangkok proved to be too soft to support such a large structure, and the building kept collapsing. Finally, after decades of unsuccessful attempts, King Rama IV decided to complete the work by hook or by crook. He had the whole collapsed structure covered with concrete, and then built a much smaller *chedi* on top of it. Today many foreign visitors as well as many Thais, ignorant of the Golden Mountain's peculiar history, think it was purposely built as an artificial mountain.

DID YOU KNOW? Bangkok's most unusual temple is Wat Yannawa. It was built by King Rama IV to serve the Chinese community, and is shaped like a Chinese junk (sailing vessel)!

Bangkok does not have one city center, but several. The official center of the city is the *lak muang* or "city pole", erected in Thai cities in the past to mark their supposed geographical center. This is where distances are measured from; for example, if you are out of town and see a sign saying "Bangkok 37", it does not mean you will reach the city limits in 37 kilometers (they are in fact much closer), but rather that the Bangkok city pole is 37 kilometers away.

DID YOU KNOW? According to a widely-circulated story, when the *lak muang* was built many people were killed and buried underneath it so that their spirits would guard the city. Many Thais still believe in the authenticity of this story, as well as in the great power of the pole, which comes from these spirits. They flock to it by the thousands, praying to the spirits and asking them for good luck.

A city of markets

Every neighborhood in Bangkok has at least one community market where fresh fruits, vegetables, meat, and fish can be bought. Most major streets are crowded with stalls selling anything from books to sweets to video cassettes. There are also several specialized markets. Near the Grand Palace is the wholesale flower market, where early in the morning flower-shop ownersand garland makers come to buy freshly picked flowers. Thais use bouquets and garlands to adorn their homes and cars as well as religious shrines. They also present garlands to wedding guests, politicians, and other honored people. Large wreaths are used in funerals and cremation ceremonies.

Every weekend crowds flock to the Jatujak Weekend Market, located next to Jatujak Park. The market was originally located at Sanam Luang Plaza, but was moved to its new location in 1982 in order to ease traffic congestion in central Bangkok. Jatujak is the ideal place for treasure hunters looking for antiques, silk weavings, porcelain, stamps, coins, clothes, used books, and all kinds of handicrafts.

Bangkok's most unique market is the Floating Market, located in the former capital of Thonburi. It is an ordinary produce market, except for the fact that the stalls are all on boats. The only way for customers to do their shopping is also by boat. Every day at the break of dawn, farmers from the surrounding countryside row to the market to sell their freshly picked fruits and vegetables. Other boats offer clothes, kitchen utensils, cold beverages, and even complete hot meals.

Rajdamnoen Avenue and Dusit

Bangkok's old main street is Rajdamnoen Avenue. It is a wide boulevard, which begins near Sanam Luang and ends at the old Parliament building. Some government offices are located along it, as well as Western-style office buildings whose architecture was ultramodern when they were built earlier in this century. Unfortunately, by now they have become dirty and dilapidated, and their sleek architecture has been hidden by large signs and building additions.

In the middle of Rajdamnoen Avenue is the Democracy Monument. Designed by the expatriate Italian sculptor and art historian Corado Feroci (who later changed his name to Silpa Bhirasri), it was erected to commemorate the end of the absolute monarchy and the promulgation of the constitution in 1932. It was built somewhat prematurely, as during much of the time since that year, Thailand has been under the authoritarian rule of the military. Nevertheless, it serves as a reminder to the people that things could be better, and has been the site of many pro-democracy demonstrations.

At the other side of Rajdamnoen Avenue, in an area known as Dusit, stands the impressive old Parliament building. It was actually built as an audience hall for King Rama V, but after the abolition of absolute monarchy it was turned into the parliament building. The building was designed and decorated by Europeans, and is totally Western in style. It is surrounded by well-groomed gardens, and facing it is a large statue of King Rama V riding a horse. As years went by, the building became too small to house the parliament and its offices, and a new Parliament building was built behind it.

Near the Parliament is an amazing building called Vimanmek Palace. It was built by King Rama V, and what is unique about it is that it is built entirely out of golden teak. In fact, it is the largest teak building in the world. Today it is a museum open to the public, housing a rich collection of art and royal memorabilia.

Not far from there is the newest--and most unusual--palace in Bangkok, Chitralada Villa. The palace consists of several buildings on a large plot of land surrounded by a wall and a moat. It is the current residence of the the king and queen. King Rama IX uses the vast palace grounds for one of his hobbies, experimental agriculture, for the benefit of the Thai people.

DID YOU KNOW? Passersby who peek through the Chitralada Palace fence to catch a glimpse of the king and queen are more likely to find themselves staring at some cows. This is because the palace grounds are the home of the king's milk farm. Some of the cows' milk is used for experimentation, and the rest is used to produce baby formula, sold at local stores at half the price of commercial brands.

Bangkok does not have many parks. Except for Jatujak Park, home of the Weekend Market, its only large park is Lumpini Park. Lumpini Park is the only park located in the inner city, and is where office workers go jogging before work, or come to relax during their lunch break. In the afternoon, teenagers come here to play soccer or *takraw* (a traditional Thai game played with a ball woven from wicker). And on weekends, Lumpini Park is crowded with families who have picnics on its spacious grass lawns, or paddle rented boats on its small lake.

The south

Thailand's southern region consists of long ranges of mountains covered with dense jungles. On both sides of the mountain ranges there are long coasts. On the east lies the Gulf of Thailand, and on the west--the Andaman Sea. Both coasts, especially the

western one, are lined with islands. The major products of the south are tin, rubber, rice, and coconuts.

The south's most important city is Nakhon Si Thammarat, simply referred to by Thais as Nakhon. It is an ancient city that in the past was the administrative center from which the entire region was governed. It also served as a spearhead for the spread of Sri Lankan Buddhism to central and northern Thailand. Today the city is still an important religious center, where people flock on holidays to observe the ancient ceremonies still practiced in its temples. It is also a center for various arts and crafts, especially handwoven and printed cloth, silverware, and coconut shell products.

Hat Yai is another important city, which serves as the region's commercial center. This is where miners and planters come to sell their tin and rubber. It is also a popular spot where Malaysian men from across the border like to come to enjoy the city's nightlife, which is much livelier than in their more conservative country. Other important southern towns include Surat Thani, Pattani, Songkhla.

Two of Thailand's premier resort areas are located in the south: Phuket and Ko Samui. Phuket is an island in the Andaman sea, off the western coast of Thailand. Its landscape is hilly and covered with jungles, coconut groves, and rubber plantations. Its name comes from a Malay word which means "hill". Until the 1970s, Phuket's economy was based on its rich tin mines and rubber plantations. Despite its beauty and long stretches of sandy beaches, few tourists came to the island because it was hard to reach. After roads were improved and a bridge was built to connect the island to the mainland, growing numbers of tourists started flocking to the island, and many hotels and resorts were built to accommodate them. An international airport has by now done away with the last remnants of Phuket's isolation. Today it is quickly catching up with Patthaya, and may soon become Thailand's most important resort.

DID YOU KNOW? Phuket almost fell to the Burmese and then to the British within two years. In 1785, Burma staged a massive invasion of Thailand, and tried to take Phuket too. Two local sisters, Chan and Mun, led the inhabitants into battle against the invaders, and managed to repel them. The following year a British adventurer by the name of Captain Francis Light came to Phuket, married a local woman, and sought to claim the island for the British Crown. However, the Thai government strongly protested, and the British, who in the meantime managed to obtain an island colony from a nearby Malay kingdom, lost their interest in Phuket.

Ko Samui is another southern resort island (*ko* is the Thai word for "island"). Located on the eastern side of the Malay peninsula, its rise to fame has been more recent but otherwise similar to that of Phuket. Here it is still possible to find a secluded beach, and the main form of accommodation is in the form of small bungalows built by local residents on the beach. Another advantage which Ko Samui has over Phuket is that swimming is possible on all sides of the island all year round, due to its location inside the Gulf of Thailand.

Thailand's Provinces

The administrative divisions of Thailand are called *provinces*, and are much smaller than the four regions. There are seventy-three provinces in all, including the Bangkok Metropolitan Area. Every province has a capital, which has the same name as the province itself--a practice which foreigners find somewhat confusing. The largest provinces are Chiang Mai (in the north), Ubon (northeast), and Korat (also in the northeast). The most populous provinces are Bangkok, Korat, and Ubon.

The Climate

The four seasons as we know them--summer, fall, winter, and spring--are not recognized in Thailand. Instead, Thais distinguish between three seasons: the rainy season, the hot season, and the cool season. But don't let the names fool you: the rainy season and the cool season (actually called "cold season" in Thai) are hot as well, although not as hot as the hot season.

The change of seasons in Thailand (and the rest of Southeast Asia) is caused by winds called *monsoons*. In June, the monsoons bring in the first rains, which gradually get stronger and more frequent until they subside in October. Then, a different kind of monsoon brings dryness and relative coolness, which last until February. In March, yet another kind of monsoon causes the temperatures to start rising again, and the air becomes humid and sticky, until the wind direction changes again and brings rainy relief.

The climate in Thailand is usually described as tropical: hot, humid, very rainy, and with relatively little fluctuation in temperature. However, this description tends to over-simplify the situation. Due to its fairly large size and varied topography, there are actually several types of climate within the borders of Thailand.

In the mountainous north and especially in the northeastern plateau, temperatures are extreme, with very hot days and cool nights. During the cool season (November-February) the nighttime temperature can drop below 40° F; however, it never snows.

In the central region, the difference between daytime and nighttime temperatures is not as pronounced. But because of its topography, which consists of flat inland plains - the heat and humidity are sometimes unbearable, as there is often no wind to alleviate them. As for the south, the weather is hot day and night, all year round; almost all the population, however, is concentrated along the coasts, where cool breezes often blow.

DID YOU KNOW? Using a number of factors and analyzing data from around the world, the World Meteorological Organization has declared Bangkok to be the world's hottest city.

Flora and fauna

Thailand's flora (plant life) and fauna (animal life) are among the world's richest. Until recently, most of the country was covered by tropical forests; but during the last several decades massive destruction of forests has been taking place in order to open new areas for cultivation. This was also a means of making quick profits from selling the wood. In the early 1960s, natural forests covered about 60% of the country. By the 1990s, natural forests have been reduced to only 25%. These forests formed the habitat (home) of a very large number of animals and plants. Naturally, when the forests disappeared, the plants and animals that lived in them disappeared as well. Even in places where forests survive, animals are still widely hunted for food as well as for use in wildlife products.

The flora of Thailand varies from region to region. The northern forests consist of tall, large trees, with a dense undergrowth. In the arid northeast, there are mostly small trees and shrubs, as well as bamboos. The south is covered with thick jungles, as are those parts of the center that are not cultivated. Along the coastline there are mangrove forests.

Many species of animals found in Thailand are endangered, and some have become extinct. Both single-horned and double-horned rhinoceros used to live in the south. They became extinct in the beginning of the twentieth century. The Schomburgk deer was hunted out of existence in the middle of the twentieth century because of its prized horns. Some tigers can still be found in western and southern Thailand, although they are on the verge of extinction. Another endangered species is the gaur, a giant wild ox that lives in the mountains of the north and the northeast. In the forests of the north and the south there are still some wild elephants, although most have beem captured to be used as beasts of burden in the logging industry.

Elephants enjoy a special status in Thailand, similar to that enjoyed by cows among the Hindus. In the past, the Elephant Corps formed an important part of the Thai armed forces. The early Thai kings reportedly kept thousands of elephants for military purposes. The war elephants were treated with great respect and given special names. Today, elephants are still widely respected in Thailand, and are protected by a special law.

DID YOU KNOW? The animal most sought-after in Thailand is the white elephant. These are albino elephants, born without natural pigmentation. While not actually white, they have lighter skin and eyes than normal elephants. The discovery of white elephants, which are extremely rare, is considered to be an auspicious sign of good fortune for the kingdom. Whenever one is caught or born in captivity, it is led to Bangkok and presented to the King. It is believed that the more white elephants a monarch has, the more prosperous his kingdom will be. More than one war in Southeast Asia has been caused by the desire to capture white elephants from a neighboring state.

Other large wild mammals that inhabit the forests of Thailand include several kinds of monkeys, gibbons, leopards, panthers, bears, deer, and wild boars. Reptiles include crocodiles, land and sea turtles, and many kinds of snakes, including cobras, which are sometimes tamed by snake charmers. The forests are also inhabited by many species of exotic tropical birds and butterflies.

Some people in the West would like to see most or all hunting in Thailand stopped. Some countries (like the United States) have banned the importation of wildlife products. Thais counter that many people still depend on hunting for their livelihood, and that wildlife products are an important part of the Thai economy. The problem of environmental protection is likely to continue to strain relations between Western countries and developing countries like Thailand.

Natural resources

Thailand has abundant natural resources. Its forests supply a variety of woods, which support an extensive industry. This includes products such as paper, plywood, firewood, gums, and dyes, in addition to wood for construction and furniture. The country's river and ocean fishing industries provide a large variety of fish and crustaceans, which constitute an important part of the Thai diet. The surplus harvest from the sea is exported, making Thailand one of the world's largest exporters of seafood.

Thailand has large deposits of many minerals, ores, and metals, including tin, iron, copper, lead, and zinc. Thai gemstones, especially sapphires and rubies, are mined in the western and eastern regions, and are an important source of income. Another very important resource is natural gas, large deposits of which are found in the Gulf of Thailand.

Thailand's most important natural resources, though, cannot be valued or marketed. These are her industrious people and her fertile soil. The surplus of food produced in Thailand has provided the foundation for the country's economic growth and stability. For many decades, food has been Thailand's major export and source of revenue.

Summary

Thailand is located in the heart of Southeast Asia and occupies an area of about 200,000 square miles. Its shape resembles an elephant's head, and it shares common borders with Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Malaysia. There are four distinct regions: the north, the northeast, the south, and the central plains. The north consists of jungle-covered mountains, and its major city is Chiang Mai. The northeast is an arid plateau whose most important town is Khorat. The largest city in the fertile plains of the central region is Bangkok. Finally, the south is a narrow strip of land consisting of mountain ranges lined by coasts; its ancient capital is Nakhon Si Thammarat.

Bangkok, the capital of Thailand, has a population of about 10 million. Its most important sites are the Grand Palace and the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. Thailand enjoys a tropical monsoon climate, and has a rich but endangered variety of fauna and flora. It also has other abundant natural resources.

UNIT 1 Student Activities

Class debate topic

Pro and con: a hunting ban in Thailand.

Assignments

A. Library tasks

1. Name two American states whose combined area is roughly equivalent to that of Thailand.

2. In this chapter, we have mentioned three of Thailand's rivers: the Chao Phraya, the Mekong, and the Ping. In an atlas, find the names of another three rivers. Through which regions do they flow?

3. In 1785, Phuket was saved from becoming a British colony, because the British had managed to secure another island colony from a nearby Malay kingdom. Can you name that Malay island?

B. Review questions

1. What are the four regions into which Thailand is divided? What factors determine this division?

2. Why can strawberries and apples be grown only in northern Thailand?

3. For what is the city of Chiang Mai famous?

4. What is the Golden Triangle?

5. What is a plateau? Where can we find a plateau in Thailand?

6. What are Thailand's most important archeological sites? Where are they located?

7. Why are the Central Plains called "the rice bowl of Asia" ?

8. What is the importance of the city of Ayutthaya in Thailand's history?

9. What is the connection between the province of Kanchanaburi and World War II?

10. Why were many of Bangkok's canals filled in?

11. Why was Bangkok chosen as Thailand's capital city?

12. Name some problems which the inhabitants of Bangkok face.

13. What is a *chedi*?

14. Why do no monks reside at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha?

15. Sanam Luang Plaza is used for what purpose?

16. Why do Thais sometimes call Wat Po "the oldest open university?"

17. What problems did the builders or decorators of the Temple of Dawn and the Golden Mountain face? How were the problems solved?

18. What important places are located at the Bangkok area of Dusit?

19. What are Thailand's three most important resorts? What problems, if any, are they facing?

20. What are the two most important cities in the south? What is their importance?

21. What are monsoons? How do they affect the weather in Thailand?

22. What are white elephants? What role do they play in Thailand?

C. Creative thought

1. The northeast is Thailand's poorest region. Why do you think this is so?

2. Why, in your opinion, are there so many ancient Cambodian sites in the northeast, and not in the south, for example?

3. What could be the cause for the discrepancy between the official and unofficial population estimates of Bangkok?

4. If you were given a free air ticket to Bangkok, but allowed to visit only three places, which places would you visit, and why?

5. What is your opinion about the controversy regarding the main building of the Grand Palace?

6. Why do you think it was Nakhon Si Thammarat which served as a "religious link" between Sri Lanka and Thailand, rather than, say, Ayutthaya or Chiang Mai?

7. How does the climate in Thailand compare with the weather in your home state, in terms of seasons and temperatures?

Unit 2: The People

The population of Thailand

During the 20th century, Thailand has experienced one of the most dramatic population increases in world history. At the time of the first modern census in 1911, Thailand had a population of about 7 million. By 1991, the population had reached an estimated 56 million, a 700% percent increase in eighty years. This has made Thailand one of the world's 20 most populous nations.

What accounted for the bulk of this growth was a sustained high birth rate, coupled with a sharp drop in infant mortality. In the past, Thai women bore a large number of children, but many of them died in their infancy. But by the 1960s, many more children survived their infancy due to improved health conditions and better nutrition, and grew up to become adults and have families of their own. The result was a sharp increase in population.

The government realized that things were getting out of control: the cities (especially Bangkok) were overcrowded, the arable land was being quickly used up, and the forests were being destroyed in order to make room for more farms to feed the growing population. There was a real danger that soon the country's resources would be depleted, and it would be impossible to provide jobs or even food for everyone. Consequently, the government launched a national family planning program in 1970. They encouraged people to use birth control and have fewer children, using the slogan "Many Children Make You Poor". This program has been very successful; within 20 years the natural rate of increase has dropped by almost half. Under present conditions, Thailand is no longer in danger of running out of room and food for its people.

Ethnic Thais

About 80% of the population of Thailand is made up of ethnic Thais. They speak related Tai dialects, and share many cultural traits, such as following a branch of Buddhism called Theravada. Ethnic Thais are divided into four groups, which

more or less correspond with the four major geographical divisions of the country. There are many different names for these groups, but we will simply call them central Thais, northern Thais, northeastern Thais, and southern Thais.

Central Thais, although not the largest group, nevertheless dominate the scene. The political center of the Thai state has been located in the central plains since the 13th century- first in Sukhothai, then in Ayutthaya, and finally in Thonburi and Bangkok. The king and most members of the royal family are central Thais, as are many of the political and military leaders. The central Thai dialect is regarded as the standard one, and is used in all aspects of public life.

Central Thais have traditionally been rice farmers. They live in wooden houses built on stilts along the many rivers and canals which crisscross the fertile central plains. Their houses are distinct, having steep pitched roofs ending in gables. The gables are decorated with a checkered pattern, and their framing beams end in upward curves. In addition to growing rice, many central Thais also grow vegetables and fruit, and raise animals. Central Thai food is usually spicy, and contains more meat than do dishes in other parts of the country. Most prized are the many kinds of curry, prepared with coconut milk and a variety of herbs and spices.

Northern Thais live in the valleys of the mountainous north. Their houses can be distinguished from central Thai houses by the X shape formed by the outermost roof beams. The houses are usually built along the rivers which flow in the valley beds. Because the northern region is so mountainous, it is not very suitable for growing rice. As cash crops (crops which are sold for money rather than consumed by the farmers), the villagers prefer growing fruits and vegetables. Another important source of income used to be wood from the regions dense forests, but in recent years many areas have been deforested by greedy developers, and the logging of many trees such as teak has now been banned.

Because of the north's proximity to China and Myanmar, their culture has been influenced by the cultures of these countries. In the past, northerners had their own country called Lan Na complete with a king and a court. Distinct northern art, music, and dances were encouraged by the court, and can still be seen in the north today, long after its incorporation into Thailand.

DID YOU KNOW ? The best-known of the court dances of the north is known as the "fingernail dance". It is a slow and elegant courtly dance performed by women wearing brass fingernails several inches long.

Northern food is not as spicy as central food. It consists mostly of dips and curries which, unlike the curries of central Thailand, are prepared without coconut milk. They are eaten with glutinous rice and fresh vegetables.

Northeastern Thais form the largest Thai group. Their region is comprised of a vast plateau and hilly areas. The northeast is the most arid part of Thailand: rainfall is light, the soil is not very fertile, and droughts are frequent. Many northeasterners grow glutinous rice, which forms the staple of their diet. They also grow cassava, a plant with an edible starchy root which looks like a long thin yam. Most dairy farms in Thailand are located in the northeast, because the infertile hills which are not suitable for cultivation can be used as grazing areas.

Northeastern dishes are lighter than those of other regions, because little coconut, oil, or sugar is used in the cooking. Most meals consist of glutinous rice accompanied by green papaya salad and raw vegetables such as cabbage and cucumbers. Meat dishes such as grilled chicken or beef salad are eaten only on special occasions. Most dishes are prepared with plenty of lime juice, garlic, and chili peppers.

In terms of both culture and language, the northeastern Thais are close to the people of Laos. The language used along the Mekong River, which forms the border between the two countries, is the same on both sides of the border. People in Laos and northeastern Thailand resemble each other, dress in a similar way, eat similar food, and live in similar houses.

Southern Thais form the smallest of the four major ethnic groups of Thailand. They live along the coasts of the Malay Peninsula, and are concentrated mostly on the east coast. Most southern Thais derive their income from rubber plantations and tin mines, as well as from sea-related occupations, such as fishing. Southern Thai food is the hottest of all of Thailand's regional cuisines. It includes many fish dishes, and is noted especially for fiery-hot fish curries.

The southern Thais should not be confused with the Malays, who form the other major ethnic group of the south. The two groups have different cultures, religions, and languages. The Malays are discussed below under "Other groups".

Thai or Siamese?

Since time immemorial, the Thai have called themselves "Thai". However, until fairly recently Thailand was known to foreigners, both Westerners and Orientals, as Siam. Many explanations have been offered for these two names, but the issue will probably never be settled, as both terms are very ancient.

The meaning most often given to the name Thai is "free". This would fit in with the historical Thai trait of fiercely guarding their independence. Thus "Thai people" would mean "free people", and "Thailand" would simply be "land of the free". However, recent research has shown that the original meaning of the word Thai was more probably "person" or "people". But why should a nation call itself "people"? In former times, many peoples had names only for foreign peoples, not for themselves. The name people call themselves is often the word for "people" in their language. For example, the Gypsies call themselves Romany, which means "people" in the Gypsy language, and the word *Deutsch*, which the Germans use to refer to themselves, originally had the same meaning.

As for the name "Siam", for a long time it was thought the word meant something like "dark", because presumably the Thai had a darker complexion than some of their neighbors. Some newer studies theorize that this name is actually a variation of the ancient Thai word *sam*, meaning "small spring". The ancient Thais used to build their settlements near springs, and consequently the settlements received the appellation "Sam", followed by the particular spring's name. Some of these ancient settlements, such as *Sam Nua* and *Sam Tai*, still exist in present-day Laos. The Cambodians, who were the Thai's neighbors, might have interpreted the word *Sam* as the name of the people. In Cambodian this name changed to *Siam*, which is the form adopted by other languages.

From the 1850s and until 1939, the official name of the country was Siam, adopted under foreign influence. Then, in a nationalistic move, the government decided to change the name to Thailand. When World War II ended in 1945, it was changed back to Siam, in order to disassociate the country from the period of collaboration with the Japanese, which coincided with the period the country was called Thailand. However, in 1949 there was another wave of nationalism, and the name was changed back to Thailand and retained ever since.

DID YOU KNOW? Some people still object to this choice of *Thailand* as the country's name, since it ignores one fifth of the population which is not ethnically Thai. However, switching back to Siam would not improve the situation, because for some "Siamese" has the meaning of "central Thai", discriminating against other ethnic groups.

The Thai Language

What we call the Thai language is actually a number of closely related languages spoken in Thailand. The Thai government refers to them as dialects of the same

language, in order to stress the unity of the country. Most people who are not linguists follow the government's practice, and so will we.

Generally speaking, there are four dialects of Thai, each corresponding to one of the country's four regions. The most important dialect is central Thai, spoken, as its name implies, around the central plains. Its importance comes from the fact that it is the language of the capital of Thailand and of the royal family. Because of this, it has become the standard language of the entire country. It is used on the radio, on television, and in newspapers. It is also the dialect used as the medium of instruction in schools and the language used for writing books. Often, when people say "Thai" without specifying the dialect, they actually mean central Thai.

The northeastern dialect is called *Isan* by its speakers. Northeastern Thais form the largest ethnic group in Thailand, but since almost all Thais (including the northeasterners) speak central Thai as either their first or second language, it enjoys only second place in terms of number of speakers. Northeastern Thai dialect is actually closer to Laotian than to standard Thai; a northeasterner speaking his native language will be easily understood by someone from across the border in Laos, but not by someone from Bangkok. It is considered to be a dialect of Thai only because it is spoken within the borders of Thailand.

In the south, people speak a dialect which is the closest to standard Thai of all the non-central dialects. It is probably a descendant of the language spoken in the ancient capital of Sukhothai. To linguists, this makes southern Thai a linguistic time machine of sorts: if they want to better understand the ancient Sukhothai inscriptions or have some idea of how the ancient language sounded, they can look for clues in southern Thai.

People from other regions like to make fun of the southern dialect, because its speakers are said to "swallow" parts of words. For example, the common Thai greeting *pai nai* ("where are you off to?") shrinks to *nai* in southern Thai, and the town *Haat Yaai* is called *Yai*.

The Thai language, however we define it, is very different from English or other European languages. The first thing English speakers notice about it is that it *sounds* so different. While it has many sounds (vowels and consonants) which don't exist in English, the main reason for its "weird" sound is that Thai is a *tonal* language: each syllable in the language has to be pronounced with one of several tones. Changing the tone of a syllable either changes the meaning of a word or makes the word meaningless. In English, we use tones to express such things as questions, exclamations, and simple statements. For instance, the word "go" in the sentences "I go?" "I go!" and "I go" has different tones: rising, falling, and level. However, if we

take the Thai word *khaa* "to stay" and change its tone, we get totally different words: *khaa?* (with a rising tone) means "a leg", and *khaa!* (with a falling tone) means "to kill". As if this were not enough, *khaa* with a low tone means "galingale" (a kind of ginger), and with a high tone it means "to trade". But to an English speaker all five would sound like the same word.

A question that comes to mind is: if Thais cannot change the tone of a word without changing its meaning, what do Thais use to express such things as questions and exclamations? The answer is they use special grammatical words called particles. For instance, *khun pai* means "you go", *khun pai reu* means "you go?", and *khun pai si* means "you go!". The little particles at the end make the difference.

Before Thai started borrowing words from other languages, it only had words made up of one syllable. (This partially explains why it needed to use different tones: otherwise, there wouldn't be enough words in the language, because the number of all possible syllables in the language is limited.)

A fact which baffles speakers of Western languages is that you cannot conjugate (or decline) words. In English, if we take the phrase "the cat" and add **s** to it, it becomes plural: "the cat**s**". If there is an apostrophe before the **s**, it means "of the cat", as in the phrase "the cat'**s** owner". We also add an **s** to a present-tense verb if it comes after he, she, or it: "I jump" but "she jump**s**". In Thai, all of this is impossible: a word always has the same form, regardless of things like number or tense. Instead of suffixes like English, Thai again uses particles or simply context.

Now that we know something about the sounds and structure of Thai, let us see how Thai is written. You will be happy to know that the Thai writing system does bear some resemblance to the English one, although this is hard to see right away. At first glance, Thai writing looks as strange and as different from English as Chinese. However, Thai, like English, uses an alphabet. Alphabets are different from other writing systems (like the Chinese one) in that they use a sign for each consonant and vowel. The Thai alphabet, though, is different from the English one, because vowels may appear not only after consonants (like in English), but also before consonants, above them, and below them.

For example, the letter ม represents a sound equivalent to English **m**. To write the syllable **ma**, the vowel sign า is added after it, thus: มา. To write the syllable **mo**, however, the vowel sign โ is added before the consonant: โม. To write **mee**, the vowel sign ◌ี is added above the letter: มี, and to write **moo**, the vowel ◌ู is written below the letter: มู.

DID YOU KNOW? The Thai alphabet consists of 44 consonants, 32 vowel signs and combinations, four tonal markers, a vowel-shortening marker, and even a special "killing sign" which shows the reader which letters are to be "killed" or not pronounced.

An interesting part of the Thai language is Ratchasap or "Royal Vocabulary". When talking to or about a member of the royal family, Thais use a special vocabulary to describe daily activities, body parts, and household items which pertain to the king and his family. The ordinary Thai word for "go" is *pai*, but when referring to the king the word *sadetphrarachadamnoen* is used instead. The Thai word for "bones" is *kraduk*, but the bones of a queen are *phrbaromma'atthi'*. This is somewhat reminiscent of English words like "throne" meaning a king's chair or "palace" meaning a king's house. Also, think of expressions like "her majesty has retired to her quarters" for "the queen went to bed". However, in Thai this practice is carried much further, and encompasses hundreds of words which are used *only* when talking to or about a member of the royal family.

Finally, some common Thai expressions are listed below. We tried to write them as using English spelling conventions, so read them as if they were English words. The tones, of course, cannot be written in the English alphabet; punctuation marks are used instead. Please note that this is not--of course--the normal Thai or romanized way of writing.

Thai	**English**
So what dee.	Hello!
Pie nigh?	Where are you off to?
My! pen rye.	Never mind, it's O.K.
Cop coon.	Thank you.
Car tote!	Excuse me!

Minorities in Thailand

Like all other southeast Asian countries, Thailand is not a completely homogeneous country, but includes several ethnic groups. It is true that, with over 80% of the population being ethnic Thai, and over 90% being Buddhist, it has a higher degree of homogeneity than some of its neighbors. The minorities, however, play an important role in Thai society, and their presence is felt everywhere.

The Chinese

The largest minority group in Thailand is the Chinese. A Chinese community has existed in Thailand since very early times. King U Thong, the founder of Ayutthaya, is thought by some modern historians to have come from a Chinese merchant family. King Taksin, who liberated Thailand from the Burmese and rebuilt it after the ravages of the war, was also the son of a Chinese merchant. The many Chinese loanwords in Thai also attest to the long period of contact between the two peoples.

The Chinese in Thailand number about 6 million, or approximately 11% of the total population. This figure, however, is misleading: many of the people who consider themselves Thai actually have some Chinese blood, including the present King Rama IX. While in some other Southeast Asian countries the Chinese are discriminated against and kept at arm's length, in Thailand they have been more or less integrated into mainstream society, and mixed Thai-Chinese families are quite common.

Although Chinese merchant communities have been residing in many Thai towns for centuries, the bulk of the Chinese population of Thailand are descendants of relatively recent immigrants. King Taksin (whose father, as mentioned above, was Chinese) encouraged Chinese immigration into the underpopulated central plains of Thailand. This official policy of welcoming Chinese immigrants lasted for many decades. As a result, tens of thousands of Chinese settled in and around Bangkok. At first, most of the immigrants were single men who came to seek work. Since no Chinese women were available, they tended to marry Thai women, which helped the Chinese community blend quickly into the society. However, at the beginning of this century Chinese women started immigrating to Thailand in increasing numbers. Single Chinese women married Chinese men, which allowed the development of a large group of people who considered themselves Chinese. Unlike mixed Chinese-Thai families, full Chinese families continued to speak Chinese and retained much of their original culture.

The Chinese as a group have never been a source of contention in their new homeland, and have in fact aided its economic development significantly. Nevertheless, some Thais have resented having a group of people in their midst who, at one time, dressed differently, had a different culture, and spoke a different language. Others were simply jealous of the success of the Chinese immigrants, many of whom had small businesses, and were thus wealthier than the average Thai farmer. Chinese immigration was brought to a halt; since the 1930s the number of Chinese in proportion to the total population has been steadily declining. Today, the young generation sees itself as full-fledged Thai: young Chinese Thais have Thai names, dress like other Thais, have similar cultural values, and usually do not speak any Chinese.

The contribution of the Chinese minority to Thailand has been very significant. The Chinese helped create a stable and prosperous economy in Thailand early on. In the 19th century, the modernization of Thailand was due in part to this prosperity, which in turn helped Thailand maintain its independence and avoid colonization by Western powers. Today, the Chinese minority is still responsible for much of the country's rapid economic development.

The Chinese contribution to Thailand has not been limited to economic activity. Thai culture has adopted and adapted many elements of Chinese culture. We have already mentioned that there are many Chinese loanwords in Thai. The architecture of cement and brick buildings (as opposed to wooden ones) was strongly influenced by Chinese architecture, and many of Bangkok's old districts have a distinctly Chinese appearance. Many elements of the material culture have borrowed from the Chinese, for the development of a large chinaware industry and the production of silk, both of which reached Thailand from China. Chinese cooking has significantly changed the Thai cuisine: for example, the commonly eaten noodle dishes and fried dishes are ultimately derived from Chinese dishes. Some aspects of Thai art, in particular music, also show a strong Chinese influence.

The Malays

Looking at a map of Thailand, you will notice Thailand shares its southern border with Malaysia. International borders are nowadays mostly fixed and firm, but this was not the case in the past. The division line between the area controlled by Thais and the area controlled by Malays (the main ethnic group of the modern country of Malaysia) changed frequently since the two peoples have come in contact. The border question was finally settled only in this century, through a treaty with the British, who then ruled most of the Malay peninsula. The treaty, known as the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909, left many Malays on the Thai side of the border.

Today, the descendants of these Malays form the majority in Thailand's four southernmost provinces, and smaller Malay groups (some descended from war captives) can also be found in many other provinces. The total number of Malays in Thailand is put at around 2 million. Although all of these Malays are now Thai citizens, they have preserved many of their own cultural distinctions.

The most important cultural attribute which distinguishes Malays in Thailand from ethnic Thais is religion. Malays are Muslims who follow the Islamic faith, while most Thais are Buddhists. There are no Malay Buddhists or members of other faiths; Islam and "Malayness" are regarded as inextricable from each other, so that if a

Malay converts to another religion, a rather uncommon event, the community ceases to regard him or her as a Malay. (For more information about Islam in Thailand, see the chapter on religion.)

In addition to adhering to a different religion, many Malay citizens of Thailand also speak a different language--the Malay language. Malay (in its various forms) is the most widely spoken language in Southeast Asia, and is the official language in Malaysia, Indonesia (where it is called Indonesian), and Brunei, as well as being the national language of Singapore. It is very different from the Thai language, and belongs to a different language family. Young Malays in Thailand all speak Thai, but in the provinces where Malays form the majority some older people speak only Malay.

The dialect spoken by most Malays in Thailand is called Pattani Malay, named after Pattani, the former Malay sultanate which flourished in what is today southern Thailand. (Today *Pattani* is the name of one of the Malay-dominated provinces of the south, which, however, consists of only a small part of the original sultanate.) It is different enough from the standard Malay dialect that people who only know Standard Malay cannot understand it.

Malays also have their own distinctive traditional dress. The men wear plaid sarong--broad pieces of cloth which are wrapped around the lower part of the body and tied together. They may also wear a kopiah, a traditional Muslim hat which looks like a fez or a large skullcap. The women wear sarongs with floral designs, and the more religious ones also cover their heads with a large handkerchief or a special Muslim headdress called *hijab*.

The Hill Tribes

In the mountainous parts of Thailand's north and northeast, especially in the area comprising part of the region known as the Golden Triangle, dwell some non-Thai ethnic groups collectively called *hill tribes*. There are about a dozen groups, each of which has its own language and culture, although they share a similar way of life. The most important of these groups are the Karen and the Hmong.

The Karens live in hundreds of villages along Thailand's western border with Myanmar. Many of them adhere to Christianity, although some are Buddhists or animists. They include both people who have lived in Thailand for generations, and recent refugees fleeing persecution by the military government of Myanmar.

Hmong tribesmen live in both northeastern and northwestern Thailand. Some immigrated into Thailand from China in the 19th century, while others came from Laos more recently as refugees. During the recent period of U.S. military

involvement in Southeast Asia, the Hmongs assisted the Americans. After the Communist takeover of Laos in 1975, the Hmongs were severely punished by the Communist regime in Laos for their cooperation with the U.S.. Their villagers and fields were destroyed, many were killed, and thousands fled across the border to Thailand. A large number was subsequently resettled in the United States.

The Hmong are famous for their intricate embroidery and quilting. One particular kind utilizes small colorful figures, which can be put together to make up stories. Hmongs who have immigrated to the United States have created detailed embroideries describing their plight in Laos before their escape.

The hill tribe way of life

Hill tribe people have lived in harmony with nature for thousands of years. Many practice a kind of agriculture called *slash-and-burn agriculture*. First, a piece of land is cleared and then planted with mountain rice and vegetables. When the land becomes infertile, usually after two years, the villagers leave it and move to a new site. Then they again clear a part of the forest and cultivate it.

Several important developments now seriously threaten the hill tribes' traditional way of life. Many tribes have been growing opium poppies, which is much more profitable than other crops; consequently, the Golden Triangle has become one of the world's major heroine producing areas. In recent years, the Thai government has been trying to limit the production of opium, and has been acting against its cultivators.

Another problem has been the fact that the hill tribes usually inhabit public lands, including national forest reserves. Their traditional way of life is viewed as causing damage to the forests, and consequently many villages have been ordered to relocate. They face a double problem: they have nowhere else to go, and outside the forest, they have no source of income. To better understand their predicament, one should also remember that as far as the hill tribes themselves are concerned, public lands are just that--for the use of the public. The idea that a government in a distant capital city owns this land is totally foreign to them.

Finally, in recent years thousands of Western tourists have descended upon the northern forests. They trek from village to village, in search of "authentic" tribal

people and their culture. Although well-meaning, they are often ignorant of local customs, and disrupt village life. Many pay the villagers merely for permission to enter their house or for taking their picture. The sad result has been that many villagers have completely forsaken their traditional occupations, and now derive most of their income from begging for (and sometimes even demanding) money from tourists.

DID YOU KNOW? Some hill tribe people have found a new source of income. Visitors to some villages are shown drug addicts, who--in exchange for 10 baht (40¢)--are willing to give a demonstration of opium smoking.

Tourism has also had some positive aspects for the hill tribes. Many hilltribe members can now support themselves by making handicrafts which are sold to foreign visitors. Most popular are silver jewelry, cotton weavings, and embroidered clothes and pillowcases. Indirectly, then, the tourist trade has contributed to the preservation of traditional hill tribe arts and crafts which might have otherwise disappeared.

Other groups

We have dealt with Thailand's most important ethnic minorities: The Chinese, the Malays, and the Hill tribes. There are also many smaller minority groups living in Thailand.

Tai groups. Except for the four major groups which together make up the Thai people, there are several smaller groups which speak Tai languages, but consider themselves (or are considered by others) as separate ethnic groups. This is mostly because they do not speak one of the major dialects of Thai, and may have other cultural or religious differences. These groups include the Shans, who live in northwestern Thailand; the Phuthai, Phuan, and Saek, who live in the northeast; and the Thai Lue, who live in the north.

Mons. The Mons preceded the Thai as the inhabitants of parts of the area known today as Thailand. These ancient Mons were, generally speaking, assimilated into the Thai. However, starting in the 16th century, many Mons have been periodically fleeing to Thailand in order to escape persecution in Burma. (At the time of writing, the Mons in Burma were again facing persecution.) They were welcomed by the Thai monarchs, and settled in the sites of ancient Mon villages. By the 1990s these relatively recent immigrants, too, largely assimilated into Thai society.

Cambodians. The history of Thailand and Cambodia has been one of close contact ever since the Thai moved into the area known today as Thailand. There were frequent wars between the two peoples, which resulted in large scale population movements and territorial changes. As a result, many Cambodians now live within Thailand, both in the eastern areas along the Cambodian border, and in the central region near Bangkok.

Since 1975 these Cambodians, many of whom have become "Thaified", have been joined by hundreds of thousands of refugees from Cambodia. They were fleeing the Communist reign of terror in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, and the subsequent occupation of their county by Vietnam. In 1990, the Vietnamese withdrew their forces from Cambodia, and in 1991, a peace agreement was signed between the warring factions within the country, in an effort to end the civil war. This has allowed many refugees to move back to Cambodia, after having lived for years in refugee camps in Thailand.

Vietnamese. Another minority group, dwelling mostly in eastern Thailand but also in the central region, are the Vietnamese. They came to Thailand in three waves. First, in the early 18th and 19th centuries, some Vietnamese fled religious and political persecution in their country, and found a safe haven in the more moderate Thailand. Then, when the French completed their occupation of Vietnam in 1884, more fled to Thailand. The last wave came after World War II, when many Vietnamese fled to Thailand first to escape the French and then the Communists. Some were repatriated (sent back to their country), but many have remained in Thailand.

Aboriginal groups. In the south, in addition to the large Malay population, live two other minority groups. Inside the dense jungle live some tribes who still subsist on hunting and gathering, as their ancestors did thousands of years ago. They speak Mon-Khmer languages, which indicates they are remnants of the original inhabitants of the Malay Peninsula, who lived there before the arrival of the Malays and the Thai.

Sea Gypsies. On the islands along the coast of the Andaman sea, live three groups, collectively known to Westerners as Sea Gypsies. They call themselves Urak Lawoi' (meaning "Sea People"), Moken, and Moklen. The Sea Gypsies live a simple life, and depend mostly on fishing for their livelihood. Some live in permanent settlements, while others live on their boats and wander from island to island. During the development of tourism in the area since the 1980s, many Sea Gypsies were expelled from areas in which they had lived for generations so that new hotels and resorts could be built. Large scale fishing by companies which operate well-equipped trawlers has significantly reduced the amount of fish the Sea Gypsies can catch.

South Asians. People from the Indian subcontinent have had contact with Thailand for many centuries. Much of the culture (first and foremost the religion) of the Thai has been profoundly influenced by Indian culture. Thousands of Indic words also made their way into the Thai language. However, there is no evidence of large-scale immigration of Indians into Thailand in ancient times. In recent centuries, though, a number of Indians (and later Pakistanis) have immigrated into Thailand, including thousands who came after World War II. They live mostly in urban areas, especially Bangkok, and are known as excellent tailors and textile merchants.

Summary

Thailand has undergone a dramatic growth of population during this century, from less than 7 million people to 56 million. Eighty percent of the population are ethnic Thais, the remainder being Chinese, Malays, and members of hill tribes and other small minority groups. The Thai have called themselves by that name since ancient times, but until recently most foreigners called them "Siam". The Thai language has five tones, no inflections, and is written in its own alphabet.

UNIT 2 Student Activities

Class debate topic

Thailand or Siam: which should be the country's official name?

Assignments

A. Library tasks

1. In an almanac or an encyclopedia, find out what has been the population increase in the United States since the beginning of the 20th century. How does it compare with the increase in Thailand? What do you think accounts for the difference?

2. How many speakers do the major languages mentioned in this chapter (Thai, English, Chinese, Malay) have? List them according to the relative number of speakers. (Hint: remember that in Indonesia is a variety of Malay.)

B. Review questions

1. What has caused Thailand's population explosion?

2. What are Thailand's major ethnic groups?

3. Which ethnic group is most dominant, and why?

4. How do the villagers of the north make their living?

5. What are the major occupations of southern Thais?

6. What is the origin of the names Thai and Siam?

7. What are the major dialects of the Thai language?

8. What makes the Thai language sound so different from Western languages?

9. How does Thai use particles?

10. What is Ratchasap?

11. What problems did the Chinese community in Thailand face?

12. What contributions have the Chinese made to Thailand?

13. Why are there so many Malays in southern Thailand?

14. What cultural traits distinguish the Malays from ethnic Thais?

15. What is the connection between the Hmongs and the United States?

16. What problems have hill tribes been facing?

17. What were the origins of the Vietnamese community in Thailand?

18. Who are the Sea Gypsies?

C. Creative thought

1. In this chapter, we gave an example of how to write some simple Thai syllables which begin with the sound **m**. The Thai letter equivalent to English **r** is ร . Based on the given examples, how would you write the Thai syllables **ra**, **ro**, **ree**, and **roo**?

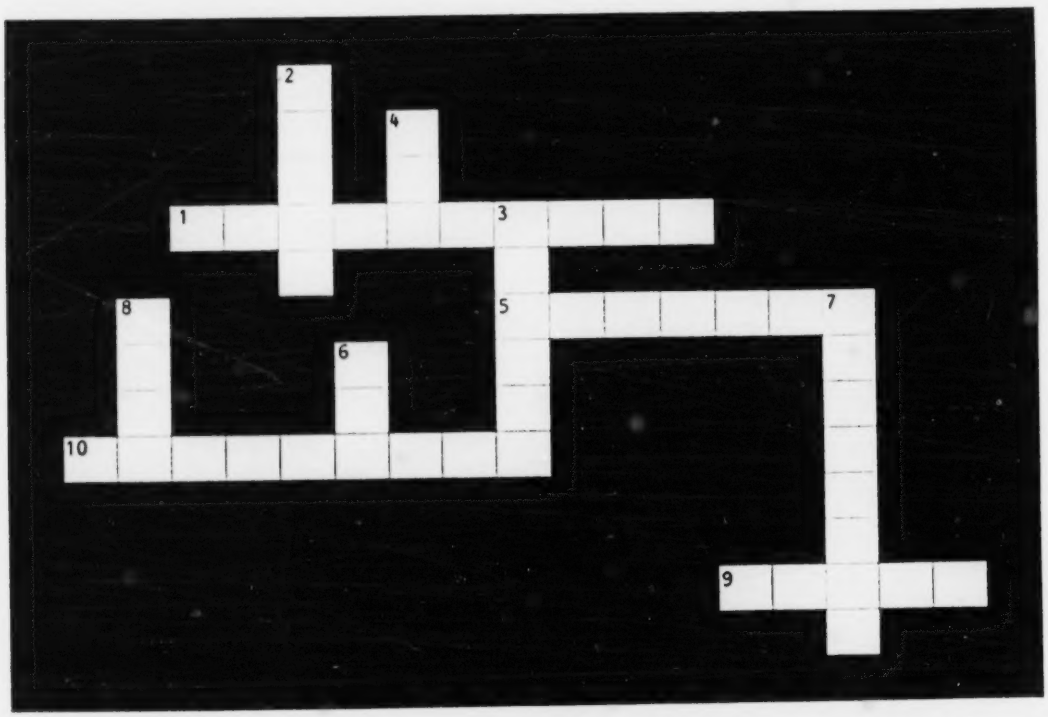
2. If you were Prime Minister of Thailand, what would you do in order to alleviate the poverty of the northeasterners?

3. Do you think it is easier for Thais to learn English or for English speakers to learn Thai? Why?

D. Just for fun

Mini crossword puzzle

1. This minority came to Thailand in three waves.
2. These make Thai sound strange to Westerners.
3. They form the majority in Thailand southernmost provinces.
4. _____ Na, an ancient kingdom in northern Thailand.
5. The northeastern Thai dialect is actually closer to this language.
6. The south's most important mined ore.
7. Thailand's poorest region.
8. _____ tribes, a generic term for the nomadic groups of Thailand's north and northeast.
9. Members of this hill tribe live along the Burmese border.
10. This kind of rice is preferred by the northeasterners.



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Unit 3: Early History

Historical and archeological evidence shows that the ancestors of the Thai started moving into the area we now call Thailand about 1,000 years ago. This immediately brings into mind two questions: who, if anyone, lived in Thailand before the Thai? And where did the Thai come from?

Prehistoric Thailand

Southeast Asia has been inhabited by humans since the dawn of history. Estimates place the first signs of human habitation between 30,000 and 40,000 years ago. Those early inhabitants were hunters and gatherers: they lived by hunting animals and gathering whatever food they could find, such as wild fruits and edible roots and leaves. Between 10,000 and 20,000 years ago, these ancient nomads started cultivating the land and growing food. One result of the switch to agriculture was that they had to settle down next to the land they cultivated, and could no longer lead a nomadic life. These early farmers lived in small villages located in valleys or along rivers in the lowlands.

Soon they started domesticating wild animals, such as water buffalo, and making clay pots and later, metal tools. We know this because ancient potsherds and tools have been discovered in archeological excavations throughout Thailand. The most famous prehistoric site is located in the village of Ban Chiang in Udon Thani province.

The Ban Chiang Civilization

In 1966 Steve Young, the son of the then U.S. Ambassador to Thailand, was doing research on the life of Thai farmers in northeastern Thailand. As his research site he chose the village of Ban Chiang in Udon Thani Province. Ban Chiang is a typical village in northeastern Thailand. Its people live in wooden houses built on stilts on a small hill. Most of the inhabitants are farmers who grow glutinous rice in the surrounding areas.

For decades villagers had been finding pieces of pottery with strange designs on them. The principal of the local school even organized an exhibition of these findings, and sent some samples to Bangkok. However, they did not stir much interest.

One day, a particularly heavy rain had just fallen on the village. Steve Young was walking down the village road, when he noticed a potsherd, which the storm had unearthed, sticking out of the mud. He dug in the earth, and at a depth of about three feet he found some more potsherds. When he cleaned them, beautiful designs emerged, either painted on the clay or incised in it: shells, deer, human figures, and geometric patterns such as squares, triangles, and concentric circles.

When Young returned to Bangkok, he took the potsherds he had found to the national museum to be examined. The museum officials at once recognized their importance, and in the following years the Thai Department of Antiquities sent expeditions to excavate the site. They made many exciting discoveries, showing that the ancient inhabitants of the region had a relatively advanced civilization much earlier than had been previously thought. Burial sites were unearthed containing animal bones in addition to human ones, which showed that the early inhabitants had already domesticated some farm animals. In addition to many pots and potsherds, a large numbers of copper items were found including axes, fish hooks, ladles, bracelets, and anklets. Some iron weapons were found as well, and even remnants of cloth and weaving instruments. Inside some of the pots archeologists found clam shells, animal bones, and rice--remnants of an ancient meal.

In 1971 the initial results of the excavations were published, and in the following year the king and queen visited the site. The royal visit brought much attention to the findings. More than anything else, the painted pots won wide admiration because of their beauty.

At first, rumors spread that the artifacts dated back to the sixth millennium B.C., or up to 8,000 years ago. This created much excitement, with some people going as far as claiming that Ban Chiang had been the cradle of human civilization. However, scientific tests later showed the earliest pottery to be no more than 5,000 years old, and the earliest bronze objects to be about 2,500 years old. The oldest painted pottery was dated to the beginning of our era, or about 2,000 years ago. While still very ancient, these were not of world-record-breaking ages as was first claimed.

DID YOU KNOW? Today there is a prospering trade in Thailand in "authentic" Ban Chiang ware. Thousands of jars and pots are produced and sold to dull-witted tourists, who really believe they are purchasing priceless ancient artifacts for a couple of dollars.

The Dvaravati period

Little is known about the inhabitants of Thailand for thousands of years following the rise and fall of the Ban Chiang civilization. What we do know is that when the curtain rises again on the region, it is inhabited by people who speak Mon and whose culture is very much influenced by Indian culture. The Mon language belongs to the Mon-Khmer language family, whose most important member is Khmer (Cambodian). The earliest inscriptions written in local languages found in mainland Southeast Asia are in Mon and Khmer, a sign of their antiquity in the region. Other groups who now live in the area, like the Thai and the Malays, are known to have migrated into the region at a later date.

Modern scholars call the Mon state which dominated the heart of Southeast Asia from the sixth century until the ninth century by the name Dvaravati. However, we do not

know exactly who the people were who lived in it or where its capital was--presuming it really was a state at all. Even its name is known almost exclusively from foreign sources, the only local piece of evidence bearing the name Dvaravati being a single coin discovered west of Bangkok. That is why some modern scholars prefer to talk of Dvaravati as a culture, rather than as a country.

More is known about Dvaravati culture than about its political background, because many archeological sites of the period have been discovered. Dvaravati cities were scattered over a large area extending from present-day Myanmar to Laos, with most sites located in central Thailand. The cities were surrounded by dikes and moats, often very long, leading us to believe that they had large populations.

The inscriptions left behind by the people of Dvaravati are in the Mon and Pali languages. This tells us that the population was at least partly Mon, and that their religion was Theravada Buddhism, whose liturgical (religious) language is Pali. Of course, the fact that the people of Dvaravati were Theravada Buddhists can be inferred from a lot of other evidence, such as Buddha images and amulets as well as remains of temples.

While Dvaravati culture gradually declined in the 9th century, we cannot say it disappeared. Its people were in a large part absorbed into other peoples of the region, but their civilization had a great impact on these peoples. The Thai (and later the Khmers as well) adopted the Mon form of Theravada Buddhism, and many traits of their material culture as well.

The Khmer Empire

The decline of the Dvaravati culture in the 9th century came at the same time as the rise of an empire which was to dominate the region for centuries: the Khmer empire. Although details about the fall of Dvaravati are as sketchy as those regarding its rise, most scholars believe that the two events were related, and that Dvaravati was physically taken over by the Khmers.

The Khmer empire was the predecessor of the modern state of Cambodia. In fact, Cambodians still call themselves Khmers. Unlike Dvaravati inscriptions, which are mostly religious in nature, the Khmer kings left behind extensive inscriptions which provide lots of information about the history of the empire. From the inscriptions we know, for example, when Angkor in the northeast area of modern Cambodia became the Khmer capital, and when surrounding areas were captured by Khmer forces.

Much of Angkor's central temple and surrounding royal buildings have survived down to our time and have undergone extensive renovations, although the civil war in the 1970s and 1980s caused them to deteriorate again. In one of the bas-reliefs (stone engravings)

decorating Angkor, there is a picture of a regiment in the Khmer army whose troops are described as Siamese. From this we learn that Thais were already present in the area in the early 12th century.

DID YOU KNOW? At its peak, the Khmer capital of Angkor was not only the largest city in Southeast Asia, but also one of the largest cities in world.

The religion of the ancient Khmers, judging from the many temples, statues, and inscriptions they have left behind, was a mixture of Hinduism and Buddhism. The Buddhism practiced in the early days of the Khmer empire was quite different from the Buddhism practiced in Thailand and Cambodia today. We will not go into detail here (there is a separate chapter devoted to religion) except to say it was Mahayana Buddhism, which treats the Buddha like a god, unlike Theravada Buddhism, which regards him as a great teacher. Mahayana Buddhists also believe in many other demigods known as Boddhisatvas, "those who are destined to become Buddhas". The ancient Khmers believed their kings were Boddhisatvas or outright gods, and developed a whole worship cult around them called **devaraja** (which means "god-king").

The Early Thai Period

As we have seen, the Thai were not the original inhabitants of the area covered by present-day Thailand. As late as 1,000 years ago, hardly a sign of them was yet to be found in the area they now occupy. Yet today, there are over 50 million Thais living in Thailand, while the Mons, who are thought to be the original inhabitants, make up only .2% of the total population. Where did these Thais come from? And what happened to the Mons? These are some of the most fascinating puzzles in Southeast Asian history. Thanks to meticulous work by historians, archeologists, and linguists, we are now able to supply partial answers to these puzzles.

The origin of the Thai

Since we know the Thai are not indigenous to present-day Thailand, it logically follows that they must have come from somewhere else. But from where? In order to answer this question, we have to look in adjacent countries for clues and traces. And indeed, in southern China (the part closest to Thailand) and northern Vietnam, we find today groups of people who resemble the Thai, speak languages similar to Thai, and have a culture different from the surrounding Chinese culture and similar to Thai culture. Some groups even call themselves by names similar to "Thai". This, among other things, has lead historians to believe that an area in southern China and northern Vietnam is the ancestral home of the Thai.

How the Thai settled the area known today as Thailand is a matter for debate. Earlier historians believed that the Thai came down to the area of present-day Thailand as part of an organized military conquest. According to Chinese chronicles, during the 13th century the Mongolians conquered the kingdom of Nanchao kingdom in the south of present-day China, where many Thais lived. This event took place immediately prior to the establishment of the early Thai kingdoms in Thailand. This led these historians to assume that the defeated Thais retreated southwards, conquering the area we now call Thailand. It is also known that the Thai had to overthrow the Khmer overlords of that region before establishing their own free states. It was thought that the only way to defeat such a mighty empire was through an organized invasion with an equally mighty army.

However, more research coupled with archeological findings have led historians to change their mind. There is no evidence of a mass migration of Thais after the fall of Nanchao. In addition, ancient inscriptions and bas-reliefs (pictures engraved in stone) were found, which mentioned Thais living in the Southeast Asian peninsula long before the fall of Nanchao or the establishment of their independent states. As already mentioned, one Khmer bas-relief even showed a Thai contingent in the Khmer army. Now, if the Thai really advanced into the region in a military invasion, what were Thai people doing there long before their army had arrived on the scene? And how come Thais were serving in the Khmer army, against which they were supposed to be fighting?

Archeological evidence seems to show that the Thai settled along the rivers very slowly, moving southwards in the course of centuries, and not in sudden "leaps", as the organized conquest theory would imply. They farmed the fertile riverbanks, which they irrigated with water from the river. If they needed more land to grow enough food for their expanding population, they simply moved down the river. When they felt strong and numerous enough, the Thai rebelled against the Khmers who
ruled that area and overthrew them. Until then, they lived as subjects of the Khmer Empire, possibly with their own autonomous states within the empire. This would explain the presence of a Thai contingent in the Khmer army.

Where did the Mons go?

Now we are getting to the second puzzle: what happened to the original inhabitants of present-day Thailand? We find no evidence that the Thai and the Mons fought each other. On the contrary, Thai culture shows signs of a strong peaceful influence from Mon culture. For instance, although originally animists, Thais adopted Theravada Buddhism from the Mons. Indian culture, which has so greatly influenced Thai culture, shows signs of having been adopted not directly from Indians, but through the Mons. And there is also some linguistic evidence showing friendly rather than confrontational relations between the Thai and the Mons.

Linguistics and related disciplines can provide invaluable assistance to historians. In the case of Thailand, linguists helped crack some of the most difficult historical puzzles. For example, they have shown that there are many Chinese loanwords even in the oldest Thai inscriptions, which supported the hypothesis that the Thai had lived in China before migrating down to Southeast Asia. There are also many Mon and Khmer loanwords in Thai, including the word for "sea" and "coconut"--implying that the Thai probably came from a place in which they had no access to the sea and where there were no coconuts. They adopted the word from the local inhabitants when they came down to Thailand. The Thai alphabet, too, is based on the ancient Mon and Khmer scripts (which in turn are derived from Indian scripts).

Based on this evidence, and on the fact that the total number of Mons in all of Southeast Asia today is less than one million, many historians now believe that the Mons did not retreat from the Thai, but were rather assimilated by them. This would mean that the modern Thais are actually a mixture of ancient Thais and Mons (and probably Khmers), both ethnically and culturally.

Thais and Tais

The ancient Thais did not migrate only into the area covered by present-day Thailand; they also migrated into areas which today are part of Myanmar, Laos, and India. In order to distinguish these groups from the Thai who settled down in Thailand proper, we use the term *Tais* as a roof term referring to all of these groups together, while reserving the term *Thais* only for those who live in Thailand.

In Burma, the Tai settled in an area known today as the Shan state. In fact, the name "Shan" is probably related to "Siam", Thailand's old name. They established independent states and called themselves Tai Yai or "Greater Thais", a name they still use today. Later, the Shans lost their independence to the Burmese, and are today incorporated into Burma. The Shans have not given up the hope of regaining their independence, and have been conducting a guerrilla war against the central Burmese authorities for decades. The war started soon after Burma became independent following World War II.

In Laos, the Tai also established an independent state. They called themselves Lao, meaning "lords". Modern Laotians are the descendants of these ancient Tais. The inhabitants of northeastern Thailand are closely related to the Laotians, with whom they share a very similar culture and language.

In India, the Tai settled in Assam, where they became known as Ahom and established an independent state. By now they have assimilated into the local population. Some say the name Assam is also related to Siam.

Finally, in northern Vietnam there are also some Tai-speaking groups. However, like the Tai of China, they may be descendants of ancient Tais who have never left their homeland.

The settlement of Thailand by the Tai

In Thailand, the Tai first settled in the north, and established several small states. Then they started moving southwards, along the river basins, until they reached the Chao Phraya basin in the central plains (see Chapter 1). This area was the location of the ancient Mon kingdom of Dvaravati, which had come under Khmer control in the 11th century. At first, the Tai lived alongside the Mons under Khmer rule. Slowly, the Tai blended in with the Mons, and established several dependent states. The term "dependent" here means that although these states were populated mostly by Mons and Thais, they were ruled by the Khmers and formed part of the Khmer Empire. During the 13th century the Tai of the Chao Phraya basin managed to overthrow their Khmer overlords and established small independent kingdoms.

Sukhothai--cradle of Thai civilization

Some time later, a Shan king who ruled over an independent state located in present-day Burma decided to expand his kingdom. He sent an army, led by his son, to the

northern part of the Chao Phraya basin to fight against the Khmers. The Shan army managed to drive the Khmer overlords out of an important dependent state called Sukhothai. Before leaving for his home state, the Shan prince appointed General Nam Thom, the commander of his army, as king of Sukhothai. Thus was born the Kingdom of Sukhothai, the first important Thai kingdom. It is sometimes referred to today as the "cradle of Thai civilization".

Sukhothai's rise as a regional power was meteoric. Sukhothai's military power grew, and it soon controlled a large area. A sign of Sukhothai's strength was that not long after its foundation, the mighty Khmer emperor king decided to give his daughter in marriage to the son of Sukhothai's king Nam Thom, who had earlier defeated the Khmers. The Khmer king also presented the Thai prince with a ceremonial sword, and bestowed a royal Khmer title upon him.

The idyllic relations between the Thai and the Khmers soon collapsed when the Khmers launched a military campaign against Sukhothai in an attempt to regain control over it. However, the Thai not only repelled the attackers but even managed to expand their kingdom's territory, at the expense of the Khmers.

This was not the only blow which the Khmers had to suffer during that period. Internal strife within the Khmer court encouraged other dependent states to rebel against the central rule. It also provided the Thai of Sukhothai with even more opportunities to expand their sphere of influence both northwards and southwards, while the Khmers were busy fighting with each other.

The King Ram Khamhaeng inscription

The greatest king of Sukhothai was Ram Khamhaeng, who is known mostly from an ancient inscription which bears his name. The inscription, dated 1292, credits the king with the invention of the Thai alphabet in 1283, and lists his conquests and the wide boundaries of his kingdom. The inscription also gives a fascinating description of life in Sukhothai under Ram Khamhaeng's rule. Here are the opening paragraphs of the inscription, translated into English:

> In Ram Khamhaeng's time, the city of Sukhothai is prosperous. In the water there is fish, in the fields there is rice. The ruler of the country does not impose taxes on his subjects who travel together along the roads, taking cattle to the market, or riding horses for sale. Whoever wishes to trade in elephants or in horses, may do so; whoever wishes to trade in silver or gold, may do so. If a common man, a nobleman, or a chief becomes sick, dies, or disappears, his house, his clothes, his elephants, his family, his rice granaries, his slaves, and his areca and betelnut orchards are all inherited by his children. If the common people, nobles, or chiefs have a dispute, the king investigates the matter thoroughly, and then passes judgement for his subjects with complete impartiality. He does not connive with thieves and receivers of stolen goods. If he sees another person's rice, he does not covet it; and if he sees another person's treasures, he is not jealous. Whoever rides an elephant to meet him and places his own country under his protection, receives assistance. If the stranger does not have any elephants, horses, servants, wives, silver, or gold, he gives him some, and then asks him to consider himself at home. If he captures warriors or enemy soldiers, he neither kills nor beats them. There is a bell hanging in front of the palace gate; if an inhabitant of the kingdom has any complaint or any matter that is deeply bothering him and torturing his soul, and he wishes to let the king know about it, it is not difficult: all he has to do is ring the bell which is hanging there. Every time King Ram Khamhaeng hears such an appeal, he asks the plaintiff about the matter and passes judgement with complete impartiality.

This inscription was discovered by King Rama IV in the year 1833, before his ascension to the throne. At that time, he was serving as a monk in a remote monastery. Until recent years, the Ram Khamhaeng inscription was universally accepted as one of the most important historical documents ever found in Thailand. But in recent years, a group of young historians, both Thai and non-Thai, have suggested that this inscription

is simply "too good to be true", and was actually written after its alleged date of composition. A leading Thai scholar even went as far as to suggest that King Rama IV himself faked the inscription. As evidence, these scholars cite various words in the inscription which they claim are not consistent with the language of Sukhothai; the alphabet in which it is written, which is unlike any other ever discovered in Thailand; and certain historical facts mentioned in it, which supposedly do not correspond to what is known from other sources.

Other historians and linguists insist that the language of the inscription *is* consistent with that of Sukhothai. They also claim that the peculiar alphabet, rather than being a sign of forgery, actually points to the inscription's authenticity: if someone wanted to fake an ancient inscription, why would he purposely make it different from what he was supposedly trying to imitate? A leading historian has also shown that the buildings mentioned in the inscriptions do correspond to later archeological findings in the area, although this could not have been known in the middle of the 19th century, when the inscription was discovered. In addition, linguists have shown that the inscription demonstrates a perfect knowledge of the sound system of ancient Thai, and uses correctly some ancient words whose meanings have only been discovered recently. They maintain that no one, not even a genius as King Rama IV is known to have been, could have possibly possessed this knowledge in the 19th century or earlier.

DID YOU KNOW? William Gedney, a leading Thai language scholar who has written extensively about the Ram Khamhaeng controversy, has labelled those who believe the inscription is a fabrication "the Young Turks". To be evenhanded, he also calls his own conservative group "the Old Turkeys".

The mystery remains without a definite solution: Is the inscription authentic? If not, who wrote it? When? And for what purpose? Whichever the case may be, Sukhothai of the late thirteenth century was at the peak of its power and cultural flowering. The area under its direct control covered a substantial part of mainland Southeast Asia. The capital city of Sukhothai, bearing the same name as the country, was a large and prosperous city with impressive public buildings, ornate temples, magnificent palaces, and spectacularly large Buddha images. The city has been excavated and restored by archeologists and now forms a national park, named a World Heritage site by UNESCO. The sound of classical Thai music fills the air again, as graceful dancers perform courtly ballets at festivals organized by the Thai Fine Arts Department.

It should be emphasized that Sukhothai was not the only Tai state in the region. Northwest of Sukhothai lay the state of Phayao, and further north--the large and strong kingdom of Lan Na. To the south was Lopburi, formerly a province of the Khmer Empire. This is in addition to the other Tai principalities outside the borders of modern Thailand, some of which have been mentioned above. The importance of Sukhothai lies in the fact that it was both the largest and strongest Tai state of its period, and that the modern kingdom of Thailand is commonly regarded as its successor.

For a while it seemed that nothing could stop Sukhothai from becoming the largest and strongest power in the region. It had a prosperous economy, a thriving culture, a humane regime, and a mighty army. However, Ram Khamhaeng's heirs were pious Buddhists, who devoted themselves to the study of religious teachings. They did not take much interest in running the empire, which soon declined as fast as it had arisen. Before the people of Sukhothai could realize what was happening, they were taken over by another Thai kingdom, which had been rising south of them: Ayutthaya.

Summary

The oldest settlement in Thailand is Ban Chiang, where pottery and other items dating up to 5,000 years ago have been discovered. From the sixth century until the ninth century the Mon Dvaravati culture dominated the region. It was supplanted by the Khmer Empire, predecessor of today's Cambodia. The Thai gradually migrated into present-day Thailand over centuries, coming probably from southern China. The original Mon inhabitants assimilated into them, leaving their mark in the shape of important religious and cultural influences. Sukhothai, often called the Cradle of Thai Civilization, flourished in the 13th and 14th centuries. Its most important king was Ram Khamhaeng, who invented the Thai alphabet and left a detailed inscription describing his kingdom.

UNIT 3 Student Activities

Debate topic

The King Ram Khamhaeng inscription: an authentic artifact or a fake?

Simulation Game

Suppose the U.N. had existed in the 13th century. Divide the class into three groups: the Mons, the Khmers, and the Thai. Each group will then present its case before the U.N. to claim sovereignty over the Chao Phraya basin.

Assignments

A. Library tasks

1. According to the most recent information you can find, what is the situation of the Mons in Myanmar?

2. Give a brief description of the ancient Khmer capital of Angkor (Angkor Wat).

B. Review questions

1. What is the Ban Chiang civilization?

2. Where was Dvaravati located, and who were its inhabitants?

3. Why do we know more about the political history of the Khmer Empire than about contemporary states?

4. What were the religions of the ancient Thais, Mons, and Khmers?

5. Where was the ancestral home of the Thai? How did they settle the area known today as Thailand?

6. What was the fate of the Mons who once lived in central Thailand?

7. What is the difference between the Tai and the Thai?

8. In which present-day countries can major Tai groups be found?

9. Why is Sukhothai called "the cradle of Thai civilization"?

10. What is the controversy surrounding the King Ram Khamhaeng inscription?

11. Briefly summarize life in Sukhothai, as described in the Ram Khamhaeng inscription.

12. What was the main cause for the decline of Sukhothai?

C. Creative thought

1. What is a "dependent state"? Can you name some dependent states mentioned in this chapter? Can you find modern day examples of dependent states?

2. How can linguistic evidence provide support for historical hypotheses?

Unit 4: Ayutthaya

Ayutthaya is located on an island in the Chao Phraya river, about 80 km (50 miles) north of the modern capital of Bangkok. By the 14th century, it was already a prosperous city, but the circumstances surrounding its establishment as capital of the Thai kingdom are still shrouded in myth.

The legend of King U Thong

According to tradition, there once was a king who had a beautiful daughter. One day, the princess was served an eggplant which had been grown by an ugly gardener. The gardener was called Nay Saen Pom, or "Mister Hundred Thousand Blotches," because his body was covered with ugly blotches from head to toe. After eating the eggplant, the princess became pregnant. The king was understandably upset, but decided to wait until the child--a boy--was born. Then he had all the men in his kingdom rounded up, and ordered them to offer food to the baby. The man whose food offering the child accepted would be declared the legal father and would marry the princess.

Needless to say, all the men in the kingdom were very excited about the prospect of marrying the princess and instantly becoming rich and famous. They procured the best delicacies money could buy, and set out for the palace, where they offered them to the young boy. To their disappointment, the boy refused to touch any of the food. Nay Saen Pom, being but a poor gardener, could not afford to buy anything special, and brought the only food item he could find at home: a lump of cold, leftover rice. To everyone's amazement, the baby reached for the cold rice and ate it all up, as if it were a rare delicacy.

When the king found out his prospective son-in-law was a lowly gardener, and an ugly one at that, he was enraged. He ordered his daughter, together with Nay Saen Pom and the child, be put on a raft and floated down the Chao Phraya river, away from his kingdom. The raft floated downstream for a while, and then landed at Nay Saen Pom's vegetable garden. There the Hindu god Indra, patron of the unfortunate, appeared to Nay Saen Pom and gave him a magic drum. Each time the drum was beaten, Indra would appear and grant him any wish, up to three times.

Nay Saen Pom took advantage of all three wishes. First, he wished his blotches would disappear, whereupon he became a very handsome man. Then he wished for a city to rule over, and again Indra granted his wish and gave him a city. Finally, he asked for a golden cradle (*u thong* in Thai) for his son. The young prince was named U Thong (pronounced *oo tong*), after his golden cradle. When Nay Saen Pom died, he succeeded him as King U Thong I, and named his city U Thong as well.

For six generations, Nay Saen Pom's descendants ruled the city, all under the name of U Thong. During the reign of U Thong VI a cholera epidemic swept through the city, and the king and his court were forced to flee southwards. They chose a strategically located island in the Chao Phraya river, and established a new city there. King U Thong VI named his new city Ayutthaya, after a holy Hindu town in northern India.

The facts behind the myth

Like many historical legends, this story apparently has a grain of truth in it. Nay Saen Pom was probably a real historical figure, as were his father-in-law and his son King U Thong I. In 1351, a king called Rama Thibodi was crowned in Ayutthaya, and many consider him to be none other than U Thong VI. The kingdom, perhaps ruling from another capital, was evidently already strong when he ascended the throne, because only a few years later we find Ayutthaya in control of an empire even larger than Sukhothai had been.

King Rama Thibodi proved to be an able and wise ruler. Apparently through marriage, he gained control over the two important states of Suphanburi and Lopburi, and appointed his brother-in-law and son, respectively, to rule them. Soon, Ayutthaya became a large and powerful country, and was to dominate the Chao Phraya basin and its surroundings for the next four centuries.

Interestingly, while becoming a mighty empire, Ayutthaya did not enjoy internal political stability. After Rama Thibodi's death, the two ruling houses of Suphanburi and Lopburi started fighting over the control of Ayutthaya. The struggle continued for forty years, as each side seized the throne by force and sometimes by murder. The house of Lopburi seems to have been defeated for good in the internal struggle by 1409, and a period of greater stability followed.

Ayutthaya's economic development and its implications

Within a short period, Ayutthaya had asserted itself not only as a military power, but also as an economic one. One of the main factors which contributed to its economic success was a process of seemingly little consequence: the switch from cultivating glutinous rice to cultivating non-glutinous rice.

Traditionally, the staple of the Thai had been glutinous rice, popularly known as "sticky rice" because its grains are chewy and stick to each other. This kind of rice grows well in the mountains, and in fact still constitutes the staple of the inhabitants

of the mountainous north and northeast. However, the Chao Phraya basin consists mostly of flat marshlands, where glutinous rice does not grow very well. This is mainly because the water level in the swamps rises periodically, and the slow-growing glutinous rice does not have a chance to ripen before the water rises. Ayutthaya's farmers therefore looked for a kind of rice which would grow fast enough to be planted after the water rises and harvested before the water rises again.

Their solution was to grow a non-glutinous variety of rice imported from India. The new kind of rice not only grew faster, but actually grew better in the swamps than on dry land. The Thai were thus able to convert much of the central plains, previously considered to be useless swamps, into thriving wet rice fields. In fact, so much rice was produced that after eating as much as they wanted and paying their taxes, the farmers still had large quantities left. This surplus rice was exported to other countries, and earned the country handsome profits.

In the sixteenth and especially the seventeenth centuries, Ayutthaya expanded its foreign trade to include many other commodities. They exported rice to the Netherlands Indies, wood and spices to Europe, and animal hides to Japan. Arms and ammunition were imported from Portugal, and cloth from India and Persia. Silver was also imported in great quantities. The flourishing international trade contributed to Ayutthaya's expanding economy.

The people of Ayutthaya, enjoying the fruits of their prosperous economic conditions, now had more leisure time and spare income to devote to culture and the arts. Indeed, Thai culture is said to have reached its zenith during this period. Artists and authors were given royal patronage, and created great works of art and literature: exquisite wood carvings, golden statues encrusted with precious gemstones, spectacular mural paintings, superb plays and poems. For recreation, the people of Ayutthaya practiced various kinds of athletics and sports. Performance arts, such as drama, dance, and music, were also highly developed.

The system of government

In addition to switching to growing non-glutinous rice and engaging in international trade, another factor contributing to Ayutthaya's economic strength was an efficient system of government and public administration. The older Thai *muang*s or city-states were loosely organized, and had no formal government institutions. The *chao*s (chiefs) did not exercise direct control over people's lives; the citizens owed their allegiance to lesser chiefs and heads of clans. Ayutthaya had from its early stages a very different type of government. The country was divided into regions, and the king had officials from his court stationed in each region. Thus the people were not ruled by their own chiefs, but by the king's representatives.

One of the major tasks of these governors was to oversee the corvée labor system. Corvée labor is work that people have to perform without pay for the government. In Ayutthaya, each freeman (a person who was not a slave) was required to work six months a year for the king, performing such duties as building irrigation systems or serving in the army. This system, patterned after a similar system in the Khmer Empire, helped Ayutthaya achieve a prosperous economy as well as strong military forces to defend it.

Rama Thibodi, Ayutthaya's first king, laid the foundations for the new type of government by writing laws. Before his time, *chaos* and kings passed verdicts and sentences based on their own judgement. Having written laws not only guaranteed consistency, but also permitted officials other than the king himself to serve as judges, which was of course much more practical. King Rama Thibodi's laws include the Marriage Law, Robbery Law, and Evidence Law.

King Borommtrailokanat, whom Westerners call Trailok for short, ascended the throne about a century later, in 1448. During his reign, he developed public administration to a degree unknown before. He established government ministries, such as the Department of the Army, the Department of the Navy, the Department of Agriculture, and several others. These ministries remained virtually unchanged in name and function until the reign of King Rama V over 400 years later. In fact, the two major ministries known as *Kalahom* and *Mahatthai* have retained their names until today, although their functions are now different than during King Trailok's time.

King Trailok also established the Sakdi Na system, under which each person in the country was given a number rank representing the amount of land he was theoretically entitled to own. The ranks ranged between 5 (representing five *rais* (about two acres) of land) for beggars and slaves, through 25 to 30 for skilled laborers, and up to 50,000 for princes. The king's rank was "infinite". The Sakdi Na system incorporated the entire population of the country, and remained with little change up until the late 19th century.

Relations with the West

The kings of Ayutthaya maintained trade and diplomatic relations with many countries. Trade relations with other Asian countries, especially China, had been developed for centuries; but during the Ayutthaya period, these were expanded to include Japan and several Western countries as well.

The first European country to send a mission to Ayutthaya was Portugal. In 1511, the Portuguese captured the Malay sultanate (kingdom) of Malacca, which had been

considered to be within Ayutthaya's sphere of influence. They sent an envoy to Ayutthaya to explain their position, and he was well received. The envoy signed a friendship treaty with the Siamese, under the terms of which Portugal would sell arms to Thailand, and Portuguese citizens would be able to stay in Thailand, engage in trade, and practice their religion freely.

The next Europeans to appear on the scene were the Dutch, who, in the seventeenth century, established a trade empire in the region. The Dutch East India Company, operating from their regional center in Batavia (now Jakarta, Indonesia), controlled much of the trade in local commodities that were in demand in Europe, such as coffee and spices. The Thai were interested in cultivating a friendship with the Dutch, partially as a counterbalance to the Portuguese. In 1608, they sent an official delegation to visit the Netherlands--the first Thai delegation ever sent to Europe. Playing European powers against each other was to become a feature of Thai diplomacy for centuries to come. In 1612, the English East Asia Company also established trade relations with Ayutthaya, followed by the Danish East India Company in 1620.

King Narai and the Revolution of 1688

In 1656 King Narai the Great ascended the throne of Ayutthaya. Narai is best remembered for promoting close relations with the West, especially with the French. In 1662, he allowed French Catholic priests to establish a mission in Ayutthaya, and eleven years later a French delegation brought him letters from King Louis XIV as well as from the pope.

In 1680, two significant events took place. First, the king accepted into his service a Greek adventurer by the name of Konstantin Phaulkon (also known by his English name Constance Falcon). Phaulkon was a brilliant administrator who impressed the king with his charm and fluent Thai. Soon, he was one of the king's closest advisors. Phaulkon was pro-French, and was eventually converted to Catholicism by the French missionaries in Ayutthaya. The other important event that took place during the same year was that King Narai sent an official delegation to France. The delegation was shipwrecked and never reached its destination, but the French appreciated the gesture, and reciprocated with a delegation of their own, which reached Ayutthaya two years later.

As Phaulkon continued to rapidly advance in the ranks of Ayutthaya's civil service, eventually becoming prime minister, he also became more and more allied with the French. King Narai followed his advice, and strengthened the relationship between the two countries. More delegations were exchanged, and a treaty was concluded between Ayutthaya and France allowing the French to station troops in the kingdom.

Narai also befriended the French missionaries and held religious debates with them, which led them (as well as Phaulkon) to believe he might be persuaded to convert to Christianity.

Many groups in Ayutthaya did not look favorably upon Narai's close relations with Phaulkon and the French. Some were worried about the kingdom's independence, while others feared for the fate of the Buddhist religion. Leading the forces which resisted European influence was the head of the Royal Elephant Corps, Phra Phetracha, who was the most powerful public official after Phaulkon, and Phaulkon's personal enemy as well. In 1688 King Narai fell seriously ill, and while he was on his deathbed Phra Phetracha managed to have Phaulkon arrested for treason and executed. He also had one of Narai's three eligible successors murdered, and when Narai died, he murdered the other two and became king.

The French, Phaulkon's allies, were also punished. Their missionary activities were banned, and the troops they had stationed in Bangkok with Narai's approval were expelled. Nevertheless, saving the country from foreign influence was not much more than a pretext used by Phra Phetracha to seize the throne. In fact, good relations with the West continued. Even relations with the French quickly returned to normal.

Social structure

Class mobility, the possibility of changing one's social status, was very high in Ayutthaya. Unlike other Asian social structures such as the Indian caste system, Thais attained their social status through education and achievements, not through birth into a particular class.

As in most other Southeast Asian countries of that time, slavery existed in Ayutthaya. However, the distinction between freemen and slaves was not clear-cut. A freeman would become a slave if he could not repay a debt, and would become free as soon as he repaid his debt. In addition, freemen who were not in the military or in the civil service had to perform corvée duty, which was somewhat similar to slavery.

Since husbands could be called away for service at any time, most of the family responsibilities remained with the women. The family unit was regarded as very important. Although divorce and remarriage were legal in Ayutthaya, they were not socially sanctioned.

The education system, although sexist by today's standards and far from universal, was relatively advanced. Thai boys were educated by monks, and received training in reading, writing, and a variety of trades. Some became physicians, others--craftsmen or engineers. Girls learned mostly domestic trades, such as cooking and weaving, at

home from their mothers. Cotton farming and weaving were popular occupations in Ayutthaya.

Ayutthaya's regional rivals

Until the late 19th century, the history of Southeast Asia was one of constant rivalry and struggle. Kingdoms and empires rose, fought with each other, and fell. When a major power collapsed, it was soon replaced by another. The situation ended ironically with Western colonization during the 19th century, which prevented warfare among the states of Southeast Asia. Thailand, however, was never colonized; in fact, it is the only country in Southeast Asia to have escaped this fate.

Looking back at the history of the region, it becomes clear that Ayutthaya's rise in the late 14th and early 15th centuries came when the time was ripe for a new power to emerge in the region. The Burmese empire of Pagan was disintegrating into several small states which fought with each other. The Khmer empire had started its decline, as had the Mongol empire in China. The kingdoms of Vietnam and Champa in the east were locked in a fierce struggle, and did not devote much attention to what was happening to their west. And closer to Ayutthaya, Sukhothai was experiencing a rapid decline following the death of King Ram Khamhaeng. Ayutthaya was then, so to speak, filling a void which had been created in the center of Southeast Asia.

The struggle with the Khmers

After a brief period of relative peace following the foundation of Ayutthaya in 1351, there followed a long period of constant struggle between Ayutthaya and the Khmer Empire. The two were fighting for control of central Southeast Asia, or more specifically for the western provinces of the Khmer Empire, whose population by now must have included large numbers of Thais. After nearly eighty years of intermittent fighting, Ayutthaya finally succeeded in taking the Khmer capital of Angkor in 1431. The Thai then retreated, having installed a puppet king, who took his orders from Ayutthaya. Although the Khmers quickly assassinated the puppet king and regained control over their country, they realized that they could no longer defend Angkor, which was so close to Thailand. They then moved their capital to Phnom Penh, where it has remained ever since. The Khmers were never again to threaten Ayutthaya's independence, although they did continue attacking Ayutthaya periodically for centuries to come.

Other Tai kingdoms

In the meantime, Sukhothai managed to recover much of the power and territory it had lost following the death of King Ram Khamhaeng, although it never assumed the proportions of an empire again. Following a long period of struggle with Ayutthaya, Sukhothai gradually lost its territory and authority; it was finally absorbed into the kingdom of Ayutthaya in 1438.

Further to the north, Lan Na managed to maintain its strength and independence throughout most of the Ayutthaya period. The kingdom of Lan Na was founded in the late 13th century by Mangrai, the king of a Thai state in present-day Laos. Its capital city was named Chiang Mai, or "New City". Later, the whole kingdom was named Chiang Mai, after its capital city. This northern Thai kingdom never ceased to be in conflict with Ayutthaya, and later with the court of Bangkok as well. Although at various periods it became a dependent state of Ayutthaya and Bangkok, Lan Na retained its nominal independence until the beginning of the 20th century, when it was finally incorporated into Thailand.

The Burmese

In the 16th century, the Burmese were again on the rise as a regional power. They carried out repeated raids against the kingdom of Ayutthaya, and in 1569 managed to capture its capital and turn it into a dependent state. This meant Thailand maintained only limited autonomy and had to pay taxes to the Burmese. The Burmese were assisted by a Thai provincial governor who betrayed his country, and they rewarded him by appointing him the new king of Ayutthaya.

In contrast to his father's treachery, the king's son, Prince Naresuan, was a fierce Thai nationalist. When Naresuan was nine years old, the Burmese king demanded that he be sent to Burma as a hostage, to ensure that the king of Ayutthaya remains faithful to Burma. He was returned to Ayutthaya at the age of 16, only after his father was forced to give his daughter in marriage to the king of Burma. Naresuan's years of captivity in Burma did not increase his sympathy for the Burmese or their rule over Ayutthaya. He also became the personal enemy of the Burmese crown prince.

In 1583, the Burmese demanded that Prince Naresuan organize a Thai army and help them in one of their military campaigns. Naresuan obeyed, but on the way to Burma he found out that the Burmese had plotted to have him ambushed and killed. He quickly returned with his army to Ayutthaya, which was tantamount to a

declaration of independence from Burma. The Burmese sent forces to attack Naresuan's army, but were repelled.

In 1590, the king of Ayutthaya, who had collaborated with the Burmese, died. His son Naresuan then ascended the throne. Two years later, the Burmese staged a massive attack against Ayutthaya, under the command of the Burmese crown prince, Naresuan's old enemy. In 1593, the Burmese advanced towards the important city of Suphanburi, and Naresuan himself led his troops in a fierce battle against the invaders. Riding his war elephant into battle, he located the Burmese crown prince, also on an elephant's back, and challenged him to a duel in order to decide the outcome of the battle. (Apparently, this was not rare during that period.) The Burmese crown prince accepted the challenge, and in the ensuing duel was killed by Naresuan. The Burmese forces then made a quick retreat, and Ayutthaya's independence was asserted once more.

DID YOU KNOW? Thai women of the Ayutthaya period sometimes fought in battles. Most famous of these fighting women was Queen Suriyothai, who, together with her daughter, once led an attack on the Burmese forces that besieged Ayutthaya. Queen Suriyothai was eventually killed in battle. According to the story her husband the king was engaged in an elephant duel with the Burmese commander. At one point the Burmese gained the upper hand and was about to stab the king, when Queen Suriyothai hurled herself in the spear's path. She was killed instantly, but saved her husband and the battle.

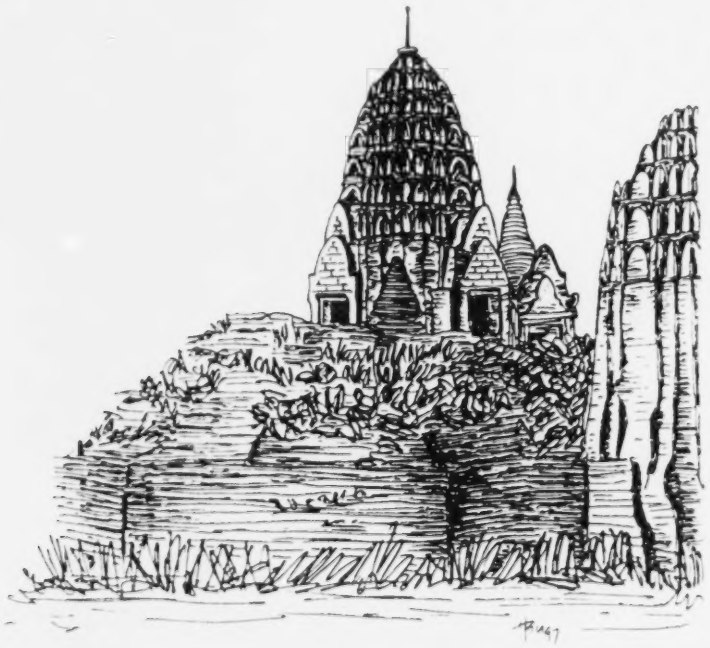
The Burmese raids did not cease after their defeat by Naresuan, but continued for another two centuries. There were ups and downs: in 1662, King Narai the Great of Ayutthaya managed to conquer large parts of Burma, including many important cities. But in the following century the Burmese gradually increased their strength, until in the 1750s they had reunified their empire under one king again. In 1760, they besieged Ayutthaya, but failed to take the city. A second siege in 1766 was more successful. In 1767, a terrible fire broke out in the besieged city, and Ayutthaya's king offered to surrender to the Burmese and turn his country into a dependent state. However, unlike previous attacks, the Burmese intention was not to create a dependent state, but to destroy Ayutthaya once and for all. They finally managed to enter the city, stripped the palaces and temples of their treasures, killed thousands, captured tens of thousands as slaves, and then burned down the entire city.

Summary

The kingdom of Ayutthaya was founded in 1351 by King Rama Thibodi, who according to legend was the sixth monarch in the U Thong dynasty. Its economy prospered due to the switch to growing non-glutinous rice, a developed international trade, an efficient government, and the extensive use of corvée labor. Ayutthaya's first king Rama Thibodi laid the foundations for the Thai legal system, and a century later King Trailok organized the government in a system which would remain virtually unchanged for 400 years. He also established the Sakdi Na system under which the entire population was organized into a complex hierarchy.

The first European country to establish contacts with Ayutthaya was Portugal, followed by England, Denmark, and the Netherlands. During the reign of Narai the Great, the French made inroads into Ayutthaya, assisted by the Greek adventurer Konstantin Phaulkon. Phaulkon was eventually accused of treason and executed, but contacts with the West continued.

Ayutthaya's regional rivals were other Tai states, as well as the Khmers and the Burmese. Sukhothai was incorporated into Ayutthaya early on, and the Khmers were defeated by Ayutthaya and their capital conquered. However, the kingdom of Lan Na, as well as the Burmese, continued to pose a threat. The Burmese captured Ayutthaya in 1569, suffered a crushing defeat in 1662, but finally managed to capture Ayutthaya again in 1767. The city was then sacked and burned down.



UNIT 4 Student Activities

Debate topic

Can or should legends be used in historical research?

Assignments

A. Library tasks

1. Find out about the government system of a Western country (for instance England or France) during the time of the 15th century. Now compare it to King Trailok's system. Are there any similarities?

2. We mentioned that the Dutch had already established a trade empire in Southeast Asia before establishing relations with Ayutthaya. What were these Dutch colonies called? Where were they located? Until when did the Dutch hold on to them?

B. Review questions

1. According to the legend, who was Nay Saen Pom? How did he get his name?

2. Which historical figure is the legendary U Thong VI identified with? What was his significance in the history of Ayutthaya?

3. Which kind of rice did the people of Ayutthaya consume? What did this have to do with Ayutthaya's economic development?

4. What other factors contributed to Ayutthaya's economic development?

5. How was the government system of Ayutthaya different from that of earlier *muang*s?

6. What were King Trailok's main contributions to the country's administration system?

7. Who were the first Europeans to establish contacts with Ayutthaya? What were the circumstances of these relations?

8. Who was Konstantin Phaulkon, and what was his position in Ayutthaya?

9. What were the underlying causes for the Revolution of 1688?

10. Why did Phra Phetracha start an anti-Western campaign in Ayutthaya?

11. What is corvée labor?

12. Who were Ayutthaya's major rivals? Which ones were the most tenacious?

13. Who was Naresuan, and what was his connection to Burma?

C. Creative thought

1. How do you think Ayutthaya's development would have been affected had it not established close ties with the West?

2. From what you know about the Khmer empire, what could have led to its replacement by Ayutthaya as the region's strongest power?

3. Only two kings of the Ayutthaya period were honored by their subjects with the title "the Great": King Narai and King Naresuan. Can you explain why these two kings were chosen over others?

D. Just for fun

If you answer all of the following definitions correctly, their first letters will make up the name of an important king.

1. Ayutthayas's important export _____
2. The capital of the Khmer Empire _____
3. How a city-state is called in Thai _____
4. A former capital of Thailand _____
5. The king who established gov't ministries _____
6. Ayutthaya exported these to Japan _____
7. The Indian god who helps the unfortunate _____
8. Thailand's neighbor to the west _____
9. How the "U" in "U Thong" is pronounced _____
10. Batavia was a colony of these people _____
11. Ayutthaya is located on one _____

Unit 5: Thonburi and Early Bangkok

After sacking Ayutthaya, the Burmese were convinced that the Thai were crushed forever. Indeed, with their capital destroyed, their economy devastated, and their leaders carried away in captivity, the remaining population was reduced to hunting, gathering, and raiding for their survival. It appeared as though it would take many years before the Thai would recover. But the Burmese failed to take into consideration the Thai's resilience and passion for freedom. Barely one year after the fall of Ayutthaya, the Thai kingdom was on its feet again, and well on the way to becoming the strongest power in the region. How did this near-miraculous event come about?

King Tak Sin (1767-1782)

After the destruction of Ayutthaya, the Burmese left behind a small garrison, and withdrew to their own country, in order to defend it from a Chinese attack. The Thai kingdom then splintered into five separate states. One of these states was ruled by a Thai general called Sin, who at the time of the Burmese invasion was the governor of the western province of Tak. He thus became known as Tak Sin. When the Burmese first attacked Ayutthaya, Tak Sin hurried to the city with his military forces. Realizing, however, that the situation was hopeless, he slipped out with his followers before the city finally fell.

Tak Sin was a very charismatic leader who could inspire courage in others. He captured the town of Thonburi, located south of Ayutthaya on the western bank of the Chao Phraya River, driving the Burmese away and making it his capital. The following year, he was crowned king of the new Thai state he had established. From there he continued his campaign to free Thailand. Using a volunteer army made up mostly of peasants, he managed to drive out the remaining Burmese and incorporate the remaining four splinter states into his kingdom.

Tak Sin's father had been a Chinese merchant, and Tak Sin used his family connections in order to secure financial assistance from well-to-do Chinese businessmen. Three years after the fall of Ayutthaya, he had succeeded in reuniting under his leadership the entire area of the former kingdom of Ayutthaya, and had even wrestled two additional provinces from Cambodia. After four more years, he managed to do what none of his predecessors had been able to accomplish: to extend his control over the northern kingdom of Chiang Mai as well.

Unfortunately, at the height of his power King Tak Sin started showing signs of insanity. He spent much of his time in meditation, trying to fly in the air. According to French missionaries who were in Thonburi at the time, he frequently beat his wife

and children. Some of his cronies had convinced him that he was a sort of a Boddhisatva, a Buddhist saint nearing enlightenment. This belief led him to what people regarded as the most outrageous of his excesses: he ordered monks to bow down to him. It should be remembered that in Theravada Buddhism monks are regarded as superior to all other people, including kings. Monks who refused his orders were removed from their positions, beaten, and jailed.

Tak Sin had thus alienated almost everyone in his kingdom: the humiliated monks, the noble families who lost their power to his autocratic rule, the farmers whose interests he had neglected, even his own abused family. A rebellion against unfair taxes which started in one of the provinces quickly spread to the capital. Without further ado, Tak Sin was deposed from his throne and sentenced to die. He was executed in a method reserved for royalty: tied inside a velvet sack, he was beaten to death with scented sandalwood clubs. This strange method was used not only because of the king's revered status, but also because of a belief that if royal blood is shed on the ground, horrible calamities will befall the kingdom. Special care has therefore to be taken, so that no royal blood is spilled.

DID YOU KNOW? Rumors which have persisted in Thailand claim that Tak Sin actually escaped death. According to this version, he owed large sums of money to Chinese moneylenders, and wanted to escape his creditors. He therefore staged a mock royal execution, during which a different person was actually put in the velvet sack. Meanwhile, he was spirited away to a palace in the south, where he lived happily for another 43 years.

Just before Tak Sin's deposition in 1782, a rebellion broke out in Cambodia which left it without a king. Tak Sin decided to seize the opportunity, and sent his foremost general Chao Phraya Chakri to Cambodia, together with a large army. Their mission was to take control of that country and install a puppet king who would take his orders from Thailand. When Tak Sin was deposed and executed, General Chakri was recalled from his campaign in Cambodia and asked to take Tak Sin's place. He accepted, and was crowned as the new king.

The First Reign (1782-1809)

The new king, known in the West as Rama I, founded the Chakri dynasty which has continued as Thailand's ruling dynasty until today. This has marked the first time in Thai history in which Thailand has had a long-standing dynasty with more-or-less regular successions. In previous periods, succession was not just a matter of heredity, but was determined more by which individual had enough power and influence to seize the throne.

One of Rama I's first actions as king was to move his capital. Thonburi was built along the outer part of a meander of the Chao Phraya River, and it was feared that the flow would slowly erode the riverbank with the buildings on it. More importantly, Thonburi was situated on the bank closer to Burma, and it was thought that a city located on the eastern bank might afford better protection from a possible Burmese attack. The king therefore decided to establish his new capital directly across the river, at the site of a small town called Bangkok. He called the new capital Krung Thep, meaning "City of Angels," but Westerners still call the city by its old name.

King Rama I then embarked upon an ambitious plan: to rebuild the lost capital of Ayutthaya on the new site. He ordered the construction of splendorous palaces and temples, built to imitate as closely as possible those destroyed in Ayutthaya. Even the names given to the buildings were identical to names of buildings in Ayutthaya. The next step was to build canals, along which people could build houses and businesses (streets were still unknown in Thailand). Soon, Bangkok had become a thriving center of commerce, culture, and administration.

Only three years after ascending the throne and establishing his new capital, King Rama I faced his first major challenge. The Burmese decided the time was ripe for another attack, and in 1785 sent very large forces which invaded Thailand at five different points. Fortunately, Rama I received advance reports warning him about the impending attack. He quickly organized his army and counterattacked, managing to defeat the Burmese on all fronts and expel them. Despite their crushing defeat, the Burmese were not yet ready to give up, and for the next twenty years staged many raids on Thailand. All these attacks were repulsed.

Rama I is best remembered as a brilliant military leader. It is easy, then, to forget many of his other achievements. As part of the overall efforts to restore Ayutthaya's glory, he sponsored the rewriting of the most important literary and religious works which had been lost in the 1767 conflagration. The most important literary accomplishment of that period was the production of a new, complete version of the

epic *Ramakian*. While historically based on Indian stories about the god-king Rama, the *Ramakian* is not a translation, but an original composition in classical Thai style. Another literary endeavor was creating Thai versions of classic literary works of other nations, including Mon, Chinese, Javanese, and Persian masterpieces.

DID YOU KNOW? The *Ramakian* is one of the longest books ever published in Thailand. The complete version runs more than three thousand pages!

Finally, another achievement of Rama I was the revision of the legal code. When he ascended the throne, the legal system was in disarray. Many of Ayutthaya's laws had been lost, while others were outdated or seemed arbitrary. The king personally rewrote some of the old laws, and promulgated many new ones. Each new law included an explanation of why this particular law was necessary, and what problems it was meant to solve.

When Rama I died in 1809, he left behind a prospering empire, larger than any previous Thai kingdom had ever been. During his 27 years on the throne, he had established and built the city of Bangkok, eliminated the Burmese threat once and for all, promoted and developed Thai art and culture, and revised the kingdom's outdated legal code. It was a hard act to follow.

The Second Reign (1809-1824)

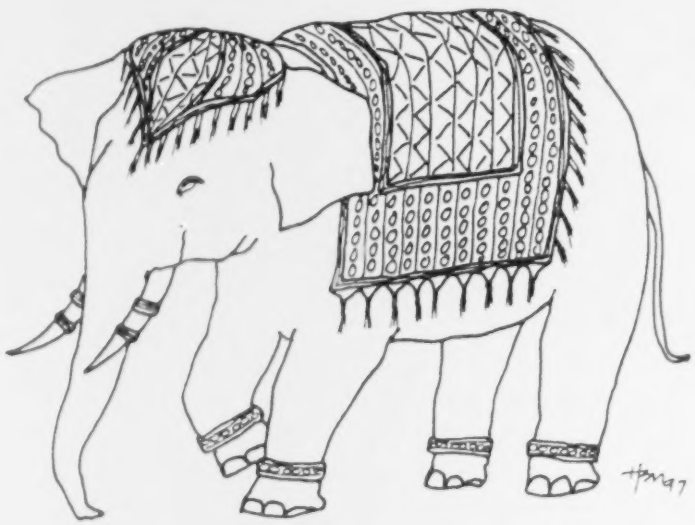
Rama I was succeeded by his son, later to be known as Rama II. His reign, which lasted 15 years, is noted for its uneventfulness. There were no radical reforms, no major wars, only some minor battles with the Burmese and a few rebellions in the Malay states in the south. This period is seen as an interlude, a time of rest between wars, in which Thailand could consolidate its power and attend to non-military matters. Rama II was not only a patron of the arts, which reached new levels of refinement during his reign, but was also an artist and a poet himself. His version of the dance-drama *Inao* is considered to be the finest of its genre.

DID YOU KNOW? Among the exhibits in the National Museum in Bangkok are two gigantic temple doors, covered with superb woodcarvings. One of them is reputed to have been personally decorated by Rama II.

The events surrounding King Rama II's death and the accession to the throne of Rama III are somewhat unusual. About a month before the king passed away, one of his prized white elephants died. It should be remembered that in Thailand, the birth or discovery of a white elephant is supposed to be an auspicious sign, which harbors

good luck to the royal family and the whole country. Conversely, when a white elephant dies, this is considered to be a bad omen.

Three weeks after the white elephant died, the king gathered his family, and announced that he had decided to have his son Prince Mongkut ordained as a monk. Mongkut was the highest ranking prince in the court, and his ordination was supposed to win his family and country much merit, and counterbalance the bad influence of the white elephant's death. The prince hurriedly left for a distant monastery, and a week later Rama II died.



During that period, succession of the throne was not an easy matter. Kings often had dozens of brothers and sons, many of whom were theoretically eligible heirs. When a king died, an accession council was convened to determine the successor. Many factors came into play, among which was age of the prince, his mother's status (full-fledged queen or just concubine) and descent (was she a commoner, noblewoman, or member of the royalty), the prince's experience, and his influence within the court and among the nobility.

According to a later analysis, Rama II knew that one of his sons who was not the highest ranking one was likely to be chosen by the accession council as the next king. That prince was older than others and had helped his father run the country, which allowed him to establish good contacts in the court as well as obtain practical experience. Rama II was afraid that a conflict would develop between this prince and Prince Mongkut, the highest ranking prince. To avoid a possible power struggle and maybe even bloodshed, he decided to have Prince Mongkut ordained as a monk and sent away.

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If this analysis is true, the old king's assessment of the situation was correct. A week after Prince Mongkut was sent away, Rama II died, and the accession council did indeed choose the older but lower ranking prince as king.

The Third Reign: 1824-1851

If the second reign was characterized as uneventful, the reign of King Rama III did not lack excitement. It so happened that the year that he ascended the throne (1824) was also the year that the British started their military penetration into neighboring Burma. They had already subdued India and obtained some colonies in Malaya, and Burma was seen as the next logical step.

Now in control of parts of Burma, the British were eager to develop good relations with their new neighbor to the east. In 1825, they sent an emissary to Bangkok in order to negotiate a treaty between the two countries. At first, the Thai were very reluctant to commit themselves. But when the war in Burma ended in 1826 with a British victory, the Thai understood they had better reach a peaceful agreement with the winning side, which was obviously strong. In that same year, Siam (as Thailand was then known) signed a political treaty and a commercial agreement with the British.

The Thai (Siamese) had reasons to be satisfied with the treaty, in which they gave up little, but gained recognition from a major European power. However, the commercial agreement which accompanied it seemed to leave them at a disadvantage. Siam now had to give up collecting most duties and taxes from foreign ships and merchants, which had been a major source of revenue. These were replaced by one low tax.

Under the leadership of King Rama III, however, this disadvantage quickly turned into an advantage. He was particularly astute at international commerce, and used the new low tax to attract a lot of new business to Siam. Because the country's trade expanded tremendously, the government was soon earning more from the new low tax than it had earned from all the old taxes and duties combined.

DID YOU KNOW? Thailand's greatest poet of all times, Sunthon Phu, was active during the second and third reigns. When Rama III (who was an amateur poet) was still a prince, his poems were sometimes ridiculed in public by Sunthon Phu, and the two became enemies. When Rama III became king, Sunthon Phu fled from the capital. He travelled in the country, and wrote travelogues in verse which have since become some of Thailand's best-known and best-loved works of literature.

A second challenge to Siamese authority came from another source. In 1827, a Laotian chief whose state was under Siamese control decided to attack Bangkok in order to free his state, rob the capital's treasures, and capture slaves. His army managed to get quite close to Bangkok, but they were then defeated and forced to flee. The following year they rebelled again, and this time Rama III decided to teach them a lesson. The rebels' capital was captured, and in 1829 was completely destroyed. When the French started their penetration into the area forty years later, they found nothing but ruins and jungle.

An important outcome of the crushed rebellion was Siam's decision to move much of the population of Laos to the west bank of the Mekong river. Here they could be better controlled, and their work would benefit the Siamese government. The result of this great population movement is still felt today: Laos has a very small population compared to its size, while the Thai side of the Mekong River is over-populated.

DID YOU KNOW? The population of Laos is about 4 million, almost half of which is made up of hilltribes. Northeastern Thais, who are ethnic Laotians, number almost 20 million. This means that today there are ten times more ethnic Laotians in Thailand than there are in Laos itself!

Two years later, in 1831, the Malay state of Kedah (in the north of modern day Malaysia) staged a large rebellion against their Siamese overlords. Soon, the rebellion spread to other Malay states that were under Siamese suzerainty. Large forces had to be mobilized in order to crush the rebellion, which was finally put down the next year. As was the custom in those days, thousands of families from the defeated states were taken captive and brought to central Siam to serve as slave laborers.

Another scene of conflict was Cambodia. For many years, the Siamese and the Vietnamese had been competing over control of that rich country. When it seemed the Vietnamese had the upper hand, the Cambodians in 1833 rebelled against the Vietnamese rule. The Siamese sent forces to assist the rebels, but they were badly beaten. In 1841 another rebellion broke out, again assisted by the Siamese. After four years of fighting, Siam and Vietnam reached an agreement under which they would jointly rule Cambodia, with the Siamese having a greater degree of control. In 1848, the Siamese finally did away with the remaining Vietnamese influence, and crowned a Cambodian puppet king.

King Rama III was active on the home front as well, where one of his important achievements was the renovation of a large temple not far from the royal palace. The temple, known as Wat Pho, houses the largest reclining Buddha image in Thailand.

Rama III was a conservative who appreciated tradition and knowledge accumulated by past generations. Fearing that knowledge might some day disappear, he had scribes cover the temple's galleries with texts about many topics such as art, medicine, astronomy, and geography. In the temple yard, he commissioned sculptures showing various yoga positions. His goal was that people from all walks of life would be able to walk in and study traditional arts and sciences at their leisure. For this reason, some Thais refer to Wat Pho as "the oldest open university".

In 1850, King Rama III fell ill. He let it be known that he regarded Prince Mongkut as the most fit to succeed to the throne. However, aware that Mongkut was not very popular, he declined to officially name him his heir. As we recall, Rama III had ascended the throne in 1824 despite the fact that he was outranked by Prince Mongkut. It seems he had some feelings of guilt, and wanted to make sure that Mongkut succeeded him, though without stirring too much controversy.

To further his goal, Rama III invited Mongkut to be the abbot of an important monastery in Bangkok, where he would be more in a position to inherit the throne than had he stayed in the countryside. Also, when his heir-apparent died, he refused to name a new one.

On his deathbed, Rama III is reported to have said:

There will be no more wars with Vietnam or Burma. We will have wars only with the West. Take care not to let them outsmart you. Anything that they propose should be well examined. Don't blindly trust them!

Unfortunately, Rama III's prophecy was to come true, more painfully perhaps than he could ever imagine. During the next 60 years, Siam was to lose much of its territory to Western colonialism and suffer many other humiliations from European powers.

Upon Rama III's death, the accession council convened and chose Prince Mongkut to be the next king. After having been absent from public life for decades, having devoted his time to meditation and study, the prince left the monastery to assume his duties as monarch. He did this with the vigor and energy of a young man, as though he had been waiting and preparing for that moment throughout his 27 years as a monk. Prince Mongkut was already married and had children before entering the monastery; now he married more women, and fathered additional children.

When the accession council elected Prince Mongkut to succeed the throne, they also invited his experienced and influential brother Prince Chudamani to rule together with him as a "second king". By doing this they hit two birds with one stone: they prevented a possible power struggle between Mongkut and Chudamani, and pre-empted any criticism of Mongkut's lack of experience in governing and public life. With the two brothers ruling side by side, the council ensured the preservation of internal peace, while satisfying demands for both experience and birthright.

The Fourth Reign: 1851-1868

What did Prince Mongkut, later King Rama IV, do during the years he waited for his turn to ascend the throne? We recall that in 1824, in order to avoid unnecessary bloodshed, he was ordained as a monk. He spent the 27 years of the third reign studying both traditional and modern sciences.

At first, Mongkut devoted most of his time to the study of Buddhism. He became very proficient in Pali, the ancient Indian language in which the scriptures of Theravada Buddhism are written. From the old writings he learned that some aspects of Thai Buddhism, especially those regarding the monkhood, had changed through the ages under the influence of other beliefs. He therefore established a new order of monks, through which he tried to purify Buddhism from pagan and other external influences. In his search for "authentic" Buddhism, Mongkut also was inspired by Mon monks, whom he believed to have preserved the purest form of Buddhism.

Later on, Mongkut's interests expanded to include secular studies as well. He befriended American and French missionaries, with whom he studied English, French, and Latin. He also took an interest in a variety of other fields such as history and mathematics. His passion for another science, astronomy, later proved to be his undoing.

While serving as a monk in Sukhothai, the cradle of Thai civilization, he discovered the famous King Ram Khamhaeng inscription. The discovery was no coincidence, because Mongkut was the leading Thai archeologist and epigrapher (inscription expert) of his time. The inscription is regarded by many as Thailand's most important archeological discovery.

Although he lacked practical experience in government and administration, by the time he ascended the throne Mongkut enjoyed a wide range of knowledge of both religious and secular nature. No less importantly, he was also well acquainted with the West, Siam's emerging adversary.

In 1855, a British emissary by the name of Sir John Bowring arrived in Bangkok. His mission was to negotiate a new treaty with Siam which would be more advantageous to the British than previous treaties had been. Bowring may have hoped to place portions of Siam under British control, as was the case in Burma. But while the Burmese exacerbated their own situation by openly opposing the British advances into Asia, Rama IV knew better. Well versed in the English language as well as in Western customs and manners, he flabbergasted Bowring by receiving him in his private quarters, offering him a cigar, and then discussing the economic situation in Southeast Asia over a glass of sherry.

Bowring realized that Siam would not be bullied as easily as Burma had been. He then quickly reached an agreement with Siam which, although exacting many economic and political concessions from Siam, at least left the country intact and independent. The most important concession was *extraterritoriality*: British subjects in Siam were no longer subject to Siamese law. British subjects who committed offenses in Thailand were to be tried by British courts and according to British laws. This was somewhat similar to modern diplomatic immunity, except that all British subjects in Siam enjoyed it, not just diplomats. It was also one-sided, because Siamese subjects in Britain did not enjoy extraterritoriality.

The Bowring Treaty, as it came to be known, also had economic implications for Siam. It sharply limited Siam's right to tax British economic activity in Siam, and did away with the government's monopoly in many areas. These were all painful concessions, but Rama IV wisely realized that this was the price he had to pay in order to maintain his country's independence.

DID YOU KNOW? Of all Thai monarchs, Rama IV is probably the one best known in the West. His fame is due to an English widow, Anna Leonowens, who was employed by him as a teacher for his children and as a secretary. She later published a book about her experience in Thailand: *An English Governess at the Court of Siam*, which served as the basis of another book, Margaret Landon's *Anna and the King of Siam*. The popular musical and film *The King and I* were based on the latter book. Unfortunately, despite her long years in Thailand, Leonowens understood little of what she saw. Her book is a mixture of fact and fiction concocted to attract readers, and the musical and film ultimately based on it are even more farfetched. Perhaps the thing Thais find most offensive is the depiction of the revered King Rama IV as a barbaric, semi-literate buffoon. In fact, he was an intelligent and prudent ruler, and by far a greater scholar than Leonowens herself had been.

Following the signing of the Bowring Treaty, Siam launched a diplomatic campaign to strengthen her position vis-à-vis the West. Soon, similar treaties were signed with dozens of countries, including the United States and Britain's chief rival in the region, France. By keeping good relations with all Western powers, and playing Britain and France off against each other, Rama IV (and his successor Rama V) managed to maintain his country's independence, while all the rest of Southeast Asia was taken over by the West.

Probably Siam's greatest setback during the fourth reign was the loss of Cambodia. During the third reign, the Siamese had managed to establish a firm control over that country, which became a Siamese protectorate (dependent state). But in 1863 the French managed to pressure the Cambodian king into turning against Siam and

making his country a French protectorate. This meant both a loss of revenue and a loss of face for the Siamese. Despite their unhappiness with the situation, there was little the Siamese could do about it. Opposing the French militarily could have meant losing their entire country, and they knew it.

When taken in historical perspective, this loss is nevertheless overshadowed by Rama IV's impressive achievements. He was able to maintain his country's independence in the face of mounting pressures from the West. He is also credited with modernizing the Siamese economy: during his reign coins and paper currency were introduced for the first time. Rama IV also worked to improve the living conditions of slaves, although he was reluctant to abolish slavery altogether, for fear of fierce opposition from powerful rich families.

In 1868, Rama IV predicted a full lunar eclipse, and decided to travel to southern Siam, where it could be best observed. He organized a large expedition, consisting of members of the royal family and the nobility, as well as Thai and foreign scientists and diplomats. The prediction proved to be precise, but unfortunately tragedy struck. While staying in a marshy area, many members of the expedition caught malaria, including the king himself and his son Chulalongkorn, the highest ranking prince.

After coming back to Bangkok, some members of the expedition died from the disease. The king lingered on for a while, but finally succumbed too. Prince Chulalongkorn, although seriously weakened, survived. Following the tradition of his two predecessors, Rama IV declined to name his successor, although it was widely known that he hoped it would be Chulalongkorn. Following his death the accession council unanimously chose Chulalongkorn as the new king.

The Fifth Reign: 1868-1910

When his father died, Chulalongkorn was only fifteen years old. According to Siamese tradition, a minor could not rule the country. Although Chulalongkorn had received an excellent education, and constant training from his father to prepare him for the task, he had to wait until he was 20 to assume his duties. Until that time, a regent (interim ruler) was appointed.

The regent was an old and experienced minister, who had a strong influence among Siam's ruling elite. Real power remained in his hands for years (even after Chulalongkorn's coming of age), but it cannot be said that he neglected his duties as the young king's guardian. Under his supervision, Chulalongkorn continued his education and made study trips to European colonies in Asia in order to learn the intricacies of modern administration.

DID YOU KNOW? Siam almost had a king called George Washington. When Rama V was still a minor, the regent appointed as the heir to the throne a prince whose father was a great admirer of the United States. He called his son George Washington, although Thais know him better by his Thai name, Wichaichan. Prince Wichaichan, however, died long before Rama V did, and never became king.

When Chulalongkorn, or Rama V, came of age and assumed his responsibilities as king, he had many ideas about how to develop and modernize his country. He created two consultative bodies, the Privy Council and the Council of State, to be the forerunners of a democratically elected cabinet and parliament; decreed the gradual abolishment of slavery; and planned radical reforms for the administrative and legal systems.

But it was not to be. As a young and inexperienced king, Rama V had few allies in the court. The regent was still more powerful and influential than the king, and together with other senior court and government officials he resisted the reforms, which he perceived as a threat to his power. A just and efficient administration meant high-ranking officials would no longer be able to extract bribes and otherwise abuse their power, and the abolition of slavery would deprive them of an important source of their wealth. A rival prince almost succeeded in staging a rebellion against Rama V, who now realized that he had to give up his reforms, at least for the time being, if he wanted to preserve his throne.

Rama V's response to these challenges to his authority was ingenious in its simplicity, yet it took a great deal of patience. Every time a senior official retired or died, the king replaced him with one of his younger brothers, who were at once the people most loyal to him and the best educated people in the kingdom. One by one, the important positions in the administration were filled by Rama V's brothers, brothers-in-law, friends, and--at a later stage--sons, until the entire upper echelon was filled with the king's faithful relatives.

DID YOU KNOW? King Rama V had over 100 wives. In that period, it was customary for kings to marry the daughters of rich and powerful persons, such as millionaires and rulers of other states. This was done in order to expand the king's influence and increase his wealth. There are records that show Rama V had 103 wives, although it is quite possible that he had some other wives who were not mentioned. It should be noted, though, that only women of royal blood could become queens. The others were called concubines; they had fewer privileges, and their sons could not become kings.

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As Siam gradually came to be run as a well-run family business, Rama V's youthful ideas of democracy and liberalism were all but forgotten. We can see how much his views changed from an incident that happened in 1885, twelve years after he mounted the throne. A group of young intellectuals who had been exposed to Western ideas (most of them had been to Britain) wrote a petition to the king, asking him to reform and modernize the way Siam was run. In essence, they wanted Siam to emulate the British system by becoming a constitutional monarchy with an elected parliament and a cabinet headed by a prime minister.

The king replied that although in theory he sympathized with these demands, they were not practical. While the petitioners believed that these reforms would help win European respect for Siam and thus ward off the dangers of colonialism, Rama V was of the opinion that the opposite was true: the suggested reforms would just cause disorganization and weaken the country. He also pointed out that there were simply not enough educated people in Siam capable of carrying out such reforms.

However, working at his own pace the king did implement some far-reaching reforms. In 1892, the traditional government system whereby the outer provinces were ruled by hereditary governors was changed. The new system was based on the Western model, and included 12 ministries each headed by a minister. The ministers together formed a cabinet, although the role of prime minister was taken up by the king.

DID YOU KNOW? King Rama V liked to travel in the country incognito (disguising his identity). This gave him a chance to meet ordinary people and get to learn firsthand about their problems and needs. According to one story, while traveling in the countryside one day, the king, pretending to be a businessman from the city, was invited for dinner at a villager's home. Before leaving, the king thanked his host, and asked him to stop by at his address should he ever get to Bangkok. A short while afterwards, the villager travelled to Bangkok and decided to look up his friend. The address he had turned out to be the king's palace. Rama V was happy to see the villager, and invited him for a dinner party at his private quarters, which the king cooked himself.

More serious than internal problems, Rama V also faced threats from the outside. Britain and France were both eager to expand their influence in the region, and repeatedly demanded more concessions from Siam. In 1893 France got a chance to take hold of Laos, a dependent state of Siam which the French had been trying to colonize for years. It used a minor incident involving two French citizens who were expelled from Siam in order to launch an attack on the Siamese forces in Laos. The Siamese defended themselves in accordance with international law, but then the French acted as if Siam had committed some serious offense, and announced that

they were going to punish her. They invaded the country and sent gunboats up the Chao Phraya River. Siam offered to withdraw all its forces from Laos, but the French were not satisfied. They threatened to blockade the Chao Phraya River unless the Siamese agreed to a series of outrageous demands.

Faced with the closure of the river on which practically all of its economy relied, the Siamese had no choice but to acquiesce to the French demands. These included paying a high ransom and handing over Laos to France. Also, two important Thai provinces were to be held hostage by the French until all the French demands were met.

Although Siam complied with all the demands, it took France fifteen years to return these provinces. They agreed to do so only after forcing Siam to cede to France all of western Cambodia, which was under Siamese control at that time. Not to be outdone by the French, the British two years later forced Siam to hand over four Malay states located in the south.

DID YOU KNOW? Rama V lost his favorite queen because of a peculiar old Siamese law. According to that law, no commoner (person without royal blood) was allowed to touch the king or a member of his immediate family, under penalty of death. One day, the boat in which the young queen and her sons were traveling capsized, and they fell into the river. No one dared try to save them, because this involved touching their royal bodies. Consequently they all drowned. The king was greatly saddened by this tragedy, and immediately abolished the old law.

Loss of territory during the Fifth Reign, added to the territory lost during the Fourth Reign, totaled almost half of the area of King Rama III's empire. Economic losses due to Western exploitation were also painful, as were the infringements on Siam's sovereignty. Yet Rama V is considered by both Thais and foreigners to have been one of the greatest kings in the country's history. Why?

By gracefully bowing to the reality of the West's superiority, and by maintaining good relations with the European powers instead of actively resisting them, Rama V made sure that what was left of his empire would remain a sovereign state. He is also credited with having modernized the country. This not only improved the living conditions of the people, but also strengthened the country against a possible attack. The government underwent reform and was reorganized along modern lines. The outer provinces, traditionally ruled by local lords, were brought under the direct control of Bangkok. Slavery was gradually abolished. A railway system was built. Electricity, telegraph, and telephones were introduced. Roads were paved in Bangkok, where the only means of transportation had been boats. Few monarchs in memorable history can compete with so many achievements.

Among Rama V's most far-reaching reforms was laying the foundations for a public education system. Before the 20th century, only children of the ruling class could afford a modern education for their children, which involved either hiring private tutors or sending them to study abroad. During the Fifth Reign, a Ministry of Public Instruction (later renamed Ministry of Education) was established, and public schools were opened in Bangkok so that children did not have to study at home or be sent abroad. Education in the rural areas, however, still remained mainly the responsibility of monasteries, as it had been for centuries. There were no funds for building schools all over the country, and it was decided that the need was most urgent in Bangkok.

It should be noted that the education supplied by the monasteries included vocational training in addition to religious instruction and basic skills like reading and writing. Some modern experts maintain that this system was on the whole adequate, and perhaps even more suitable for the needs of farming families than modern education.

Rama V was a hard-working monarch, who devoted most of his life to defend his people and improve their lot. Because of this, few people resented the fact that he concentrated so much power in his hands and the hands of his family. He reigned forty-two years, longer than any of his predecessors in the Chakri dynasty, and was loved and admired by subjects. When he died in 1910, the country was in shock. People shaved their heads and put on mourning clothes; others openly wept in the streets. Today, Rama V remains one of the best loved Thai monarchs of all times. Pictures of him adorn almost every house, office, and shop in the country. The anniversary of his death has become a public holiday, when people come to lay flowers at his statues and reflect upon his great deeds.

Summary

After the Burmese sacked Ayutthaya in 1767, General Tak Sin quickly expelled the invaders, reunified the country, and was crowned king at Thonburi. King Rama I established the current Chakri dynasty in 1782, and moved the capital across the river to its present location in Bangkok. King Rama II is best remembered for his artistic rather than military endeavors. Rama III concluded the first treaty with Britain, and managed to bring under control rebellions in Laos, Malaya, and Cambodia. He also developed the country's international trade, and filled its coffers with revenues. King Rama IV was a great scholar who spent twenty-seven years as a monk before ascending the throne. He discovered the King Ram Khamhaeng inscription, and is known to Westerners as the king in *The King and I*. King Rama V succeeded in warding off the danger of European colonialism by modernizing his country and by wise diplomacy.

UNIT 5 Student Activities

Debate topic

When a king is still a teenager, a regent is appointed to rule in his place until he comes of age. Is this a good or a bad idea? Can a teenager be a good king?

Assignments

A. Library tasks

1. Find out who ruled Britain and France during the conflicts with Siam in the Fourth and Fifth Reigns.

2. Look up the kings Rama IV and Rama V in an encyclopedia, both under these names and under their princely names mentioned in this chapter. Which did you find them under?

B. Review questions

1. Who was Tak Sin? How did he get this name?

2. How was Tak Sin executed? Why was such a method chosen?

3. What were the circumstances of Rama I's ascension to the throne?

4. Where did Rama I move his capital? Why?

5. Who invaded Thailand in 1785? What was the result of that invasion?

6. Briefly describe the situation in Siam at the time of Rama I's death.

7. What is Rama II most remembered as? What were his greatest achievements?

8. What was unusual about the circumstances of Rama II's death and the accession of his successor?

9. What was the extent of the British involvement in Thailand during the Third Reign?

10. With whom did Siam compete over control of Cambodia? What was the result of the conflict?

11. What is the significance of the temple known as Wat Pho to the history of Thai education?

12. Summarize in your own words Rama III's deathbed prophecy. Did it come true?

13. How did Prince Mongkut succeed the throne to become King Rama IV?

14. Where was Prince Mongkut during the Third Reign? What was he doing?

15. What is the Bowring Treaty? What advantages--and disadvantages--did it hold for Siam?

16. What is extraterritoriality? Why was it considered to be a one-sided humiliation for Siam?

17. Why is Rama IV well known in the West?

18. What were the circumstances which led to Rama IV's death?

19. What were Rama V's plans when he acceded the throne? To what extent were they implemented?

20. Why did Rama V have so many wives?

21. How did Rama V reform his government?

22. Describe the circumstances and outcome of the confrontation with France in 1893.

23. How did Rama manage to preserve Siam's independence in the face of Western colonialism?

C. Creative thought

1. It is the middle of the 19th century, and you are the King of Siam. Prepare a 5-point plan to protect your country from being taken over by European powers.

2. Make a table showing Siam's monarchs in the Thonburi and Early Bangkok periods and the number of years they reigned. Rank them according to the length of their reign. Who ruled for the shortest time? Who ruled for the longest?

Unit 6: The Emergence of Modern Thailand

The Sixth Reign: 1910-1925

Rama V departed from the tradition set by his three predecessors by appointing a designated heir, Prince Vajiravudh. Besides being the highest ranking prince, Vajiravudh was also regarded as the most intelligent and the best educated. Nevertheless, he distanced himself from his father's court, preferring to spend his time in his own palace with his friends. He therefore did not have much power or influence before ascending the throne. If the choice of successor for Rama V had been left with an accession council, it seems probable that Vajiravudh would not have been chosen. However, the respect and admiration for the late Rama V was such that no one even considered overruling his choice of successor. Prince Vajiravudh was thus crowned as the new king.

As a prince, Vajiravudh enjoyed an excellent education. After studying traditional Thai subjects at home, his father sent him to England, where he graduated from Oxford University. After returning home, Rama V spent years teaching him the art of good government. Therefore, despite his lack of power and influence, he was quite ready for the job.

Rama VI's way of handling his lack of support in the court was to create two new institutions, the Palace Guard and the Wild Tiger Movement. These institutions became his pet projects, and their members were loyal to him. The junior wing of the Wild Tiger movement still exists today, and serves as the Thai equivalent of Boy and Girl Scouts. He also replaced most of the ministers with his friends, who were not always members of the ruling elite. Rama VI's two semiprivate institutions, together with other royal expenses, drew a big part of the state budget, and caused financial problems for the kingdom.

DID YOU KNOW? Rama VI staged lavish and extravagant coronation celebrations for himself. The festivities lasted two weeks, and cost five million baht, representing about eight percent of the total government budget for that entire year.

Rama VI's achievements

Rama VI was a prolific and talented writer. He wrote everything from traditional poetry to political essays to modern dramas. He also translated many classical works of literature into Thai, including several plays by Shakespeare. In his writings, he taught his people to be proud of their national heritage while at the same time

modernizing their way of life. He tried to make them loyal to the three pillars of Thai society: nation, religion, and monarch. For this reason, he is considered to be the father of Thai nationalism.

Other activities of the king were also aimed at modernizing the country and building the Thai nation. He designed a new red white and blue flag for his country. He made education compulsory for all children aged seven through fourteen, and established the first university in Thailand, Chulalongkorn University. He also had all his subjects adopt last names in order to promote better administration. In addition, he encouraged women to take a more active role in society.

World War I and Siam

When World War I broke out in 1914, many Thais (including the king) sympathized with the Allies. However, not wanting to involve themselves needlessly in a war, Siam declared its neutrality. In 1917 the United States joined the war on the side of the Allies, which drastically changed the balance of power. When it became clear that the Allies were soon going to win, the Siamese realized that they had little to lose and much to gain by joining the war on the winning side. They dispatched about 1,300 troops to France, who arrived just before the armistice was signed in 1918.

DID YOU KNOW? At the time of World War I, the Siamese military was one of the most modern in Asia. The Siamese units sent to join the allies included mechanics, drivers, an ambulance section, and even a flying squadron--at a period when many European countries did not have an air force yet.

The move turned out to be a brilliant one. Not only did Siam not suffer any major losses, but the country gained a new footing from which it could renegotiate their status vis-à-vis the West. The United States became the first country to conclude a treaty with Siam in which the Thai were recognized as equal partners. Within a few years, other countries such as Britain and France followed suit and signed similar treaties with Siam. The special privileges enjoyed by Westerners, including extraterritoriality, were gradually reduced and done away with.

Clouds over the horizon

Despite these achievements Rama VI never enjoyed the widespread popularity of his father. He spent a great deal of time on his writing as well as on socializing with his friends, and some felt he was neglecting the country's affairs. He resisted any attempt to reform the political system, refusing even to reinstate the Privy Council

and Council of State which had been established by his father. Perhaps worst of all, he spent very large amounts of public money on his royal activities. In some years, four times more money went to cover the king's personal expenses than was given to the entire education budget of the country.

After World War I, Siam faced a serious economic crisis. The price of rice, Siam's main export, fell drastically on the world market. As if this were not enough, severe droughts caused Thai rice production to fall sharply. To top it all off the price of silver in the world market rose, and it soon became profitable to melt down Siamese silver coins and smuggle the metal out of the country, which destroyed the monetary system. In order to stop this flight of capital, the government decided to raise the value of the Siamese currency, the baht. They thought that if the face value of the coins was high enough, it wouldn't be profitable to melt them down and smuggle them out of the country. The plan backfired, because this made Siamese rice (which was priced in baht) too expensive for foreign buyers. Siam's exports fell even further, and it soon became a poor country. Unfortunately, throughout the crisis the king did not try to control his prodigious spending.

Rama VI died in 1925, before the country had a chance to recover from the recession. During the early 1920s, all the high ranking princes (Rama VI's brothers and half-brothers) died, save for one: Prince Prajadhipok, Rama V's second youngest child. Since he did not have a son, Rama VI wrote a letter before his death naming Prince Prajadhipok as his heir.

DID YOU KNOW? Two days before he died, Rama VI had a daughter. However, she never had a chance of inheriting his throne, not only because of her (very) tender age, but also because at the time women were still legally barred from becoming monarchs in Siam. This legal constraint was removed only during the reign of King Rama IX. In the 1990s, King Rama VI's daughter is still actively involved with public life, and often presides over important public ceremonies.

Leading up to the Revolution and the Seventh Reign

Prajadhipok never expected to become king, and was not well prepared for the task. Although he was intelligent and had received a good education, he was young and lacked any experience in government. Nevertheless, he immediately took steps to correct some of the mistakes of his predecessor. He established an advisory council and slashed the royal budget by almost two-fifths. He also replaced most of the cabinet members with members of the royal family whom he found more suitable for

the task, and consulted with experts on how to bring about democratic changes in his country.

Siam was now undergoing rapid modernization. Hundreds of upper class Siamese studied abroad, and returned to Siam with new ideas about democracy and socialism. Modern literature blossomed, with many new books being published in prose rather than traditional verse. The press also developed and many new newspapers and magazines started appearing.

Following the crash of the New York stock market in 1929 and the Great Depression that followed, the entire world economy went into recession. The price of rice, still Siam's main export, fell sharply. As during the recession that followed World War I, the government did not act wisely, and kept the Siamese currency at an artificially high rate by maintaining its linkage to the price of gold. That again made Siamese rice too expensive for foreign buyers, and caused exports to fall at the time they were most needed. Another unwise move was instituting an income tax that only taxed salaries, not other kinds of income. That meant that poor laborers had to pay income tax while rich businessmen did not. In a public speech, Rama VII admitted he knew nothing about economics, and was dependent on his advisors. These apparently gave him mostly bad advice.

As the 150th anniversary of the Chakri dynasty was approaching in 1932, Rama VII decided to give his people a special anniversary gift: a constitution. He already had the constitution commissioned, and was about to announce the surprise during the anniversary celebrations. However, powerful forces within the court, fearful of losing their power and influence, forced the king to cancel his plans.

By now a group of officials and military officers, many of whom had been educated in foreign democracies, decided they could not wait any longer. On June 24, 1932, they seized the opportunity of the king being out of Bangkok, and staged a coup d'état (forcible takeover of the government). Although the group of conspirators was very small, consisting of just 114 people, they managed to make themselves appear strong and quickly had control of the country. The absolute monarchy, in which the king had the last word on all matters, was abolished.

DID YOU KNOW? An old prophecy attributed to a sister of King Rama I predicted that the Chakri dynasty would last 150 years. The Revolution which abolished the absolute monarchy came in 1932, exactly 150 years after Rama I founded the Chakri dynasty.

The Regency Period, Phibun, and Pridi

Although taken by surprise, Rama VII decided to cooperate with the Promoters of the Revolution (as the group came to be known). He became a constitutional monarch: a king who is head of state, but not head of government, and who is under rather than above the law. It should be remembered that establishing a constitutional monarchy in Siam was originally Rama VII's own plan.

Rama VII was not to remain king for long. In 1933 a second coup d'état was staged by some of the original Promoters, and in the following year the king left for medical treatment in Europe. As it became clear that the new government was not heading towards democracy, Rama VII abdicated (quit his post as king) in 1935, saying he was willing to cooperate with a government of the people, but not with dictators.

Following Rama VII's abdication, the National Assembly invited his nephew, Prince Anand, to inherit his throne. The new king was still a little boy, studying in Switzerland. Therefore a committee consisting of one of the Promoters and two princes was appointed to serve as regents until he came of age.

Real power in Thailand during the regency period was concentrated in the hands of two men: Pridi Phanomyong, who was one of the three regents, and Luang Phibunsongkhram (Phibun), a military officer. Both had studied in Europe, and were strongly influenced by two very different ideologies. While Pridi became a socialist, Phibun was influenced by militant nationalism.

In 1933, it became known that Pridi had drawn up a radical socialist plan for Thailand. According to the plan, all private land and factories would be taken over by the government, and all citizens--even farmers--would become state employees. When the conservative members of the government found out about the plan, they attacked it as being a communist ploy, and forced Pridi to abandon it and leave the country until the situation cooled down.

Despite their lack of progress towards democracy, the Promoters made some significant accomplishments. The economy quickly recovered, although this was partly due to the general economic recovery in the world. Compulsory education, which had been mandated already during the Sixth Reign, was finally being put into practice. The military was also strengthened, in part because many members of the government came from the military, but also because Siam still faced the threat of foreign intervention.

In 1938, Phibun became prime minister. He was fascinated by fascist dictators like Hitler in Germany and Mussolini in Italy, and most of all admired Japan and its authoritarian government. As soon as he had control of the government, he started carrying out his dictatorial policies. He had all his major political opponents arrested, some of whom were consequently executed. He also prohibited the display of King Rama VII's picture not only in public places but even in private homes.

In 1939, Phibun changed the country's name from Siam to Thailand, in order to demonstrate the superiority of ethnic Thais vis-à-vis minority groups (Phibun was particularly anti-Chinese). Siam was the name foreigners called the country, and therefore this name had to be rejected. It was also an expression of Phibun's grandiose imperialistic dream of uniting all the peoples who call themselves Thais or Tais into one empire. Many of these "Thais" were now living in British-run Burma and French Indochina (which consisted of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam).

Phibun learned from the tactics of his political hero Hitler. In Germany, Hitler stirred up hatred of the Jews in order to increase his power and unite the people around him. In Thailand, Phibun also found an easy scapegoat in the form of the Chinese minority. He attacked them for allegedly concentrating too much power in their hands and having too much money, and also for having a different culture and language. In his attacks, Phibun enlisted the help of a propagandist, Luang Wichit, who wrote racist anti-Chinese articles to incite the people against them. Many anti-Chinese laws were enacted, their cultural and economic freedom was curtailed, and they were forbidden to practice certain occupations.

Another way in which Phibun imitated fascist dictators like Hitler and Mussolini was building a personality cult around himself. Again, with the help of Luang Wichit he created an image of himself as a supreme leader, almost a god. His pictures were displayed everywhere; his sayings were read over the radio every day; his slogans decorated walls of buildings and all other available space.

Phibun claimed all of his actions were for the good of the people, and were intended to protect them from foreign power and influence. But he contradicted himself by issuing decrees which ordered the people to imitate the Western way of life. Traditional Thai clothes were banned, and all citizens were required to wear Western style clothes, completed with shoes and a hat. The Thai new year was replace by the Western one (January 1). People were required to salute the flag as in Western countries, and to greet each other by saying "Hello", "Good Morning" or "Good Night" (in Thai, of course) instead of the traditional Thai salutations "Where are you off to?", "Where are you coming from?", and "Have you eaten yet?". The people were even instructed on how to eat and sleep in a modern, that is Western, way.

DID YOU KNOW? Phibun's "Western Clothes Decree" was so strict, that people were not allowed to enter government offices, or even board public buses, unless they were wearing a hat.

World War II

Soon after World War II started, France was occupied by Germany. The French were now powerless to defend their protectorates in Indochina, and Phibun used this chance to get back territories that Thailand had been forced to cede to the French some decades earlier, including parts of Laos and western Cambodia. He then 'modestly' renamed western Cambodia Phibunsongkhram Province after himself.

Phibun had always been an admirer of Japanese militarism, and openly supported their expansion in Asia, which was mostly at the expense of Western powers. This led to a deterioration in the relationship between Thailand and the West. Phibun's pro-Japanese policy, however, did not save Thailand from being attacked by Japan. On December 7 1941, shortly before attacking Pearl Harbor, the Japanese invaded Thailand at nine different points. They faced little resistance, and Phibun, who was out of Bangkok during the attack, rushed back to Bangkok and declared a unilateral cease fire. In effect, he instructed his forces not to fight back against the Japanese, which was tantamount to a surrender.

Thailand agreed to cooperate with Japan for several reasons. First, it was clear that fighting the Japanese would be suicidal. Secondly, Phibun and many of his followers did not object to Japan's war on the West, which was still regarded as a threat to Thailand's sovereignty. Many Thais were even proud to see an Asian nation like Japan defeat the Westerners who had threatened Thailand for so long. And finally, being a long-term admirer of Japan, Phibun did not need much arm-twisting to join their camp. In 1942, Thailand even declared war on the United States and Britain.

However, as Thais pointed out after the war when some Western countries wanted to punish them for collaborating with the Japanese, no Thai troops actually took part in military actions against the Allies. Furthermore, the Thai ambassador to the United States, Seni Pramoj, refused to deliver the declaration of war. He claimed the Japanese forced Thailand to declare war, an action which did not represent the will of the Thai people.

Phibun used his new status as a junior partner of the Japanese to realize his dream of resurrecting the old Siamese empire. Laos and western Cambodia were already in Thai hands, having been wrestled out of the French; after the Japanese took Burma from the British, Phibun also gained control of the Shan states of northern Burma, on the grounds that the Shans are the ethnic elder brothers of the Thai. In addition, the four Malay states which Thailand had been forced to cede to Britain in 1909 were returned to Thai control after the Japanese occupied them.

However, as the war dragged on, the Thai were increasingly suffering from its consequences. Basic imports from the West stopped arriving, and Japan was not able to replace them. Inflation was rampant, and the economy was suffering under the burden of war. Then came the Allied bombings of Japanese positions in Thailand, which forced many of the inhabitants of Bangkok to flee from the capital and seek refuge in the countryside.

During the same time, Thai students abroad who opposed Phibun's collaboration with the Japanese were organizing a movement, called the Free Thai Movement, in order to resist the Japanese. Their nominal leader was Seni Pramoj, the ambassador who had refused to deliver the declaration of war. The Free Thai Movement received support from the United States, and established its headquarters in southern China, near the Thai border. Many Thais within Thailand, including some high ranking members of the government, also joined the movement. However, few acts were actually carried out against the Japanese. Nevertheless, after the war the movement was used as another argument against punitive actions against Thailand, because Thais were able to show that many of them opposed Phibun's collaboration with the Japanese.

In the summer of 1944, it became apparent that Japan was going to lose the war. The Japanese government resigned, and the National Assembly in Thailand forced Phibun to resign as well. The Allies were successful in driving the Japanese out of the Philippines and Burma, and Thais were afraid that their country too was about to be occupied by Allied forces. More than anything they were afraid of becoming a British protectorate.

May 8, 1945 marked the Allied victory in Europe. It was followed by Japan's unconditional surrender on August 15, 1945, which brought World War II to an end. Thailand had escaped the war almost unscathed, but now faced serious challenges to its sovereignty and integrity.

Summary

Rama VI, who ascended the throne in 1910, was a brilliant but extravagant monarch, who brought his country to the brink of bankruptcy. His successor Rama VII was capable and well-educated, but ill-prepared for the post of king. During the world recession which started in 1929, the economy deteriorated even further. In 1932 a group of officers and officials staged a coup d'état and abolished the absolute monarchy. However, they failed to work towards democracy, and king Rama VII abdicated in frustration. He was succeeded by the child-king Rama VIII, but real control of the country remained in the hands of Pridi and Phibun, two of the original Promoters of the Revolution. Under Phibun's premiership, Thailand collaborated with the Japanese during World War II, although the Free Thai Movement put up some resistance. When the war ended, Thailand's position became very precarious.

UNIT 6 Student Activities

Debate topics

1. King Rama VI was the most controversial king of the Chakri dynasty. Was he a good or a bad king?

2. Should Thailand have collaborated with Japan during World War II?

Assignments

A. Library tasks

1. When the Japanese were expanding in Asia, what was the situation in Europe? How did that affect the outcome of the fighting in Asia and the Pacific?

B. Review questions

1. In which way did the accession to the throne of Rama VI differ from that of his predecessors?

2. What problem did Rama VI face at the beginning of his reign? How did he solve it?

3. What were Rama VI's major achievements?

4. What was the extent of Siam's involvement in World War I? How did the outcome of the war influence Siam?

5. What were Rama VI's greatest strengths and weaknesses as king?

6. Why and in which ways was Rama VII ill suited for his job?

7. What were the underlying causes of the revolution of 1932?

8. Who were Phibun and Pridi?

9. Why was the country's name changed from Siam to Thailand?

10. By whom was Phibun influenced? How did this affect his policies?

11. What was Thailand's role in World War II?

12. Briefly describe Japan's involvement in Thailand during the war.

C. Creative thought

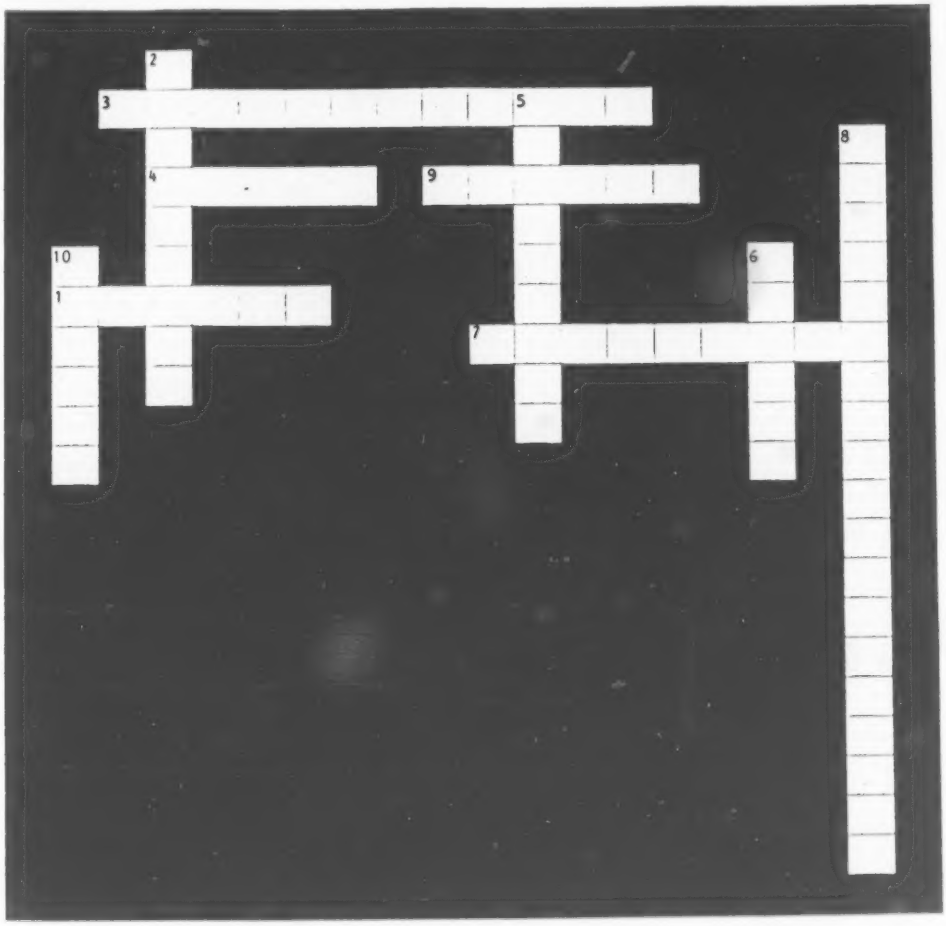
1. If you were prime minister of Thailand during World War II, how would you handle the Japanese threat?

2. Why do you think Thailand escaped the fate of its neighbors, and was not conquered by Japanese troops?

D. Just for fun

Mini crossword puzzle

1. Phibun's hero.
2. A forcible change of government.
3. King Rama VII planned to present this to his people on the 150th anniversary of the Chakri dynasty.
4. A Thai socialist leader.
5. An economic problem Thailand faced during World War II.
6. A substitute ruling until the king comes of age.
7. A movement founded by Rama VI.
8. Phibun forced his people to wear these.
9. Rama VI graduated from this university.
10. A dictatorial Thai prime minister.



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Unit 7: The Post-War Period

French and British threats

When World War II ended, Britain and France wanted to punish Thailand for its collaboration with the Japanese during the war. Britain wanted Thailand to pay huge sums as restitution, supply them with free rice, and allow British troops to be stationed in Thailand. France wanted to prevent Thailand from becoming a member of the U.N..

The Thais responded to these demands by claiming that the Free Thai Movement, not the Phibun government, represented the real wishes of the Thai people. They also pointed out that Thai troops never took part in the fighting against Allied forces. Finally, they insisted that they had hardly been in a position to fight against the Japanese, and that they collaborated with them only under duress.

Thailand also took some concrete steps to distance itself from the acts of the Phibun government. The National Assembly invited Seni Pramoj, who had nominally led the Free Thai Movement, to become the new prime minister. Thailand returned the Shan states of Burma and the four northern Malay states to British control, and later gave western Cambodia and the Laotian territory which it had seized back to the French. The United States backed the Thai position, and finally Britain and France had to relinquish their demands. Once more, Thailand had managed to maintain its independence.

Internal developments and the death of Rama VIII

In terms of internal politics, the big loser from the outcome of the the war was Phibun. He was left out of the government, and was even put on trial for war crimes. The big winner was Pridi, who had headed the Free Thai Movement within Thailand (Ambassador Seni Pramoj was the official leader of the movement, but he was not in Thailand during the war). Pridi had good contacts within the government, and was also a member of the regency council, a title which enhanced his position. Pridi controlled the country from behind the scenes while the post of prime minister changed hands with frequency. Finally in March 1946 he became prime minister.

In the meantime, the young Rama VIII had come of age and returned from his studies in Switzerland to assume his duties as king. Free elections were scheduled, and the country seemed to be on its way to finally becoming a democratic constitutional monarchy. But then things started to go wrong. Behind the scenes, Phibun started to regain his power, and the war crime trial against him was discontinued. Then on

June 9, 1946, the country was shocked to learn that King Rama VIII was found dead in his bed, dead from a single pistol shot through his head.

This tragic death has remained a mystery ever since. What enemies could the young king, who had just assumed his responsibilities, possibly have? How would murderers be able to make their way through the tight palace security, into the king's bedroom, and then out again? Was it really possible that no one saw or heard a thing?

We will probably never know the answers. An official inquiry commission appointed to investigate the death concluded that it was an accident. When the people refused to accept this strange conclusion, three palace officials were hurriedly put on trial and executed for having been involved in the murder. Since they were the only potential witnesses of the event, they carried the truth with them to their grave.

At the time it was thought by some that Pridi, who had years earlier clashed with King Rama VII, was behind the murder. He was forced to resign his post as prime minister and leave the country. In hindsight, Phibun would seem to have had much more to gain from the murder than Pridi; indeed, the events which followed the murder would eventually bring him back to power. The serious crisis gripped the country following King Ananda's death and Pridi's resignation led to a state of chaos, and finally in November 1947 the army seized control of the government. The leaders of the coup first tried to maintain a semblance of democracy by appointing a leading member of parliament, Khuang Aphaiwong, as prime minister. Khuang had served as prime minister for a year following Phibun's resignation in 1944. Upon returning to this position, he initiated the promulgation of a new constitution which would diminish the military's power. This the leaders of the coup d'état would not have; they forced Khuang to resign, and had Phibun appointed as prime minister.

King Rama VIII's younger brother, Prince Bhumibol, inherited his throne. At the time of his brother's murder he was about to come of age, but preferred to complete his studies in Switzerland before returning to Thailand to assume his responsibilities. In the meantime, a regent was appointed again. Throughout Phibun's long second term as prime minister, the monarchy's role was to be kept to a minimum, with the king having no power and practically no influence on events in Thailand.

Phibun's second term and Western reaction

Surprisingly, Western countries, including the United States, did not voice opposition to Phibun's return to power. By now the Cold War between the West and the communist world had started, and the communists seemed to have the upper hand. The West needed the help and friendship of any nation who would offer it, in order to

defend itself from what was perceived as a serious threat. Thailand, strategically located in the heart of Southeast Asia, was just too important to be snubbed. Its position was further enhanced by the fact that several communist movements were active in the region, and Thailand was seen as a bulwark against communist expansion.

If the West thought that the aftermath of World War II had taught Phibun a lesson in democracy, it was wrong. Soon, he was up to his old tricks again. Under his orders, political opponents were arrested and murdered. Ethnic minorities were persecuted again, and new anti-Chinese laws were passed. The Malay minority suffered particularly harsh repression, when their religious organizations--including schools--were banned by the government. In 1948, 1949, and 1951, there were attempted coups d'état in an effort to remove Phibun from power, but they all failed. Phibun then used these as an excuse to escalate political repression even further.

In 1951, King Rama IX returned to Thailand. He was crowned in a traditional ceremony, and immediately assumed his duties as king. These duties, however, were not too numerous, as Phibun limited the role and functions of the monarchy.

While Phibun continued to rule through much of the 1950s, other generals within his régime were also gaining power. One of them was Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat. For reasons which are still not clear, Phibun decided to hold elections in 1957. He won them, but only through cheating, threatening opposition parties, and intimidating voters. The people were disgusted with the corrupt elections, and showed their support for Sarit, who was perceived as an honest statesman free of corruption. In 1957, Sarit staged a successful coup d'état, and Phibun and his accomplices were forced into exile.

Sarit's corrupt rule

Sarit, however, proved to be as dictatorial as his predecessor, and even more corrupt. He abolished the constitution, curbed the freedom of the press, and ordered the arrest or murder of his opponents. One of his victims was Chit Phumisak, one of the country's leading scholars. Chit was first imprisoned for years, and then shot to death, officially while "attempting to escape" from the authorities. (This was a common method of political murder during Sarit's rule). During the same time, Sarit was also amassing millions of dollars, obtained through corrupt practices.

Despite the corrupt and repressive nature of Sarit's regime, Thailand made progress in several areas during his rule. The educational infrastructure was expanded and improved. More teachers were trained, more students attended school, and new schools and universities were opened. The economy also flourished under Sarit, who supported a free market economy with little government intervention.

Another important development was the partial restoration of the status of the monarchy. Under Phibun, the king and members of the royal family were powerless and rarely seen in public. Sarit, however, supported traditional values such as the monarchy, and promoted the status of the king as the father of the nation. In 1963 Sarit died while still serving as prime minister.

DID YOU KNOW? After Sarit died, his relatives started quarreling over the inheritance. It was only then that Thais found out just how corrupt he had been. During his years in power, Sarit had managed to accumulate over $150 million, at a time when the average Thai citizen was earning only a few dollars a week. The shocked populace also discovered that in addition to his two wives, Sarit left more than fifty mistresses, many of them daughters of government officials whom he had taken by force.

Thanom and Praphas

Sarit was succeeded by his deputy, General Thanom Kittikachorn. Thanom ruled for ten years, and more or less continued Sarit's policies. Thailand's relations with the United States, already strengthened during Sarit's time, became even closer under Thanom. This was due mainly to the war in Vietnam, which made both countries partners in what was regarded as the fight against communism. The United States was permitted to station tens of thousands of troops in Thailand. They also built several air bases which were used to launch attacks against North Vietnam and later against communist forces in Laos and Cambodia as well. This close cooperation, and especially the presence of so many Americans in the country, brought about increasing Western influence to Thailand.

Thanom's partner in ruling the country was another general, Praphas Charusathian, who also happened to be the father of Thanom's son's wife. In 1971, Thanom and Praphas dissolved the parliament, and banned all political parties. Gradually, opposition to their dictatorial rule grew, and in October 1973 large anti-government demonstrations were organized by students. These quickly turned into open attacks on government institutions. Thanom and Praphas instructed the armed forces to attack the demonstrators, but the army commanders refused to obey the orders. As the crisis escalated, King Rama IX let it be known that he supported the students. Thanom and Praphas now had no choice: they resigned and went into exile.

Three years of democracy

Following the 1973 revolution, Thailand enjoyed more democracy than ever before. Political parties were able to act unhindered, and the freedom of assembly and freedom of speech were guaranteed. A new law was passed giving Thailand a fully elected, unicameral parliament for the first time. (A unicameral parliament consists of just one house, as opposed to the bicameral system, in which there is an upper house and a lower house. Thais objected to having an upper house because traditionally its members were appointed by the dictators rather than elected by the people.) In 1975, the freest elections ever held until then in Thailand took place.

However, the results of the elections were disappointing. So many parties were elected to parliament that it was virtually impossible to form a coalition. (A *coalition* is a group of parties which together have a majority in the parliament, and therefore form the government.) The first coalition collapsed after two weeks; the second coalition consisted of no less than seventeen different parties, and lasted eight months before it too collapsed.

In 1976, general elections were held again, and center-right (conservative) parties received a clear majority. A coalition government was formed; however, its members constantly feuded among themselves, and paid little attention to the country's affairs. Anti-democratic forces, lead by the police, used the government's incompetence to claim that a democratic system of government could not function in Thailand. They embarked upon a campaign of terror against pro-democracy forces, in which leading activists and journalists were harassed and even murdered.

The October 6 Massacre, Thanin, and Kriangsak

Finally, in October 1976, some newspapers published a photo allegedly showing students hanging an effigy of the Crown Prince. The photo was later found out to have been faked, but the anti-democratic forces used this as a pretext to attack the pro-democracy movement. On October 6, police forces aided by members of other anti-democratic organizations launched an attack on Thammasat University, headquarters of the pro-democracy movement. Hundreds of students were brutally killed or wounded. As has happened so commonly before (and after), the military seized the opportunity to take control of the government, and suspended the constitution.

The military dictators appointed as prime minister a former judge, Thanin Kraivichien. His rule is considered by many outside observers to have been the most repressive in the country's history. Freedom of speech was sharply curtailed, and the media were strictly censored. Labor unions were banned, and opponents of the government were harassed and murdered. Civil servants who were suspected of pro-democracy sentiments were fired. Other were forced to undergo training sessions in which they were all but brainwashed.

The result of Thanin's reign of terror was that many people started seeing communism and armed rebellion as the only means of bringing about a change. Those who opposed the dictatorship, whether farmers, professors, or high school students, left their homes for the jungles where they joined communist insurgents. Many of them did not identify with communist ideology, but felt they had no other choice. Some, who could not bring themselves to join the communists, left the country and waited in exile for the situation to improve.

Thanin's form of dictatorship proved too destructive even for the military to tolerate: his actions, instead of eliminating the communist threat, only increased it. One year after being appointed prime minister, he was removed from office, and replaced with yet another general, Kriangsak Chamanand. In 1979, the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia, and the Thai military felt that Kriangsak was not able to meet this new communist challenge. His popularity suffered another blow in 1980, when inflation started soaring, and the government raised oil and electricity prices. Kriangsak was then replaced by General Prem Tinsulanonda, commander-in-chief of the army.

Prem's governments

Prem proved to be a stable and relatively liberal ruler. Unlike the preceding cabinet, which was composed mostly of military men, the majority of Prem's ministers were civilians. Prem also relaxed censorship and allowed fairly free political activity. In 1981, there was an attempted coup d'état, but Prem managed to secure the royal family's support, and the coup failed.

After the 1983 elections, Prem was appointed as prime minister for a second term. Due to the stability of his government and improved economic conditions, the communist-led insurgency gradually subsided. Many were also disillusioned with communism when the horrors of the killing fields of communist Cambodia became known. In 1985, another coup attempt against Prem was crushed, and it seemed as if coups d'état were no longer an accepted (or effective) means of changing governments in Thailand.

Chamlong Srimuang and the Phalang Tham Party

Another important political event in 1985 was Thailand's first-ever gubernatorial elections, which took place in Bangkok. Until then, Bangkok's governor (as well as the governors of all other provinces) were appointed by the government, rather than elected by the people. The government now thought that Bangkok, if not the countryside, was ripe for democratic gubernatorial elections.

The winner in the elections was Chamlong Srimuang, a former major-general in the Thai army. While still in the army, he had become more and more drawn to the Buddhist religion. He finally resigned from his military post and started leading a simple and modest life according to the way he understood Buddhism.

Even after having been elected governor, Chamlong did not change his humble lifestyle. He continued to sleep on the floor, wear peasant's clothes (instead of the resplendent Governor's uniform), refrain from smoking and drinking, and eat strictly vegetarian food. He also earned the reputation of being the first non-corrupt governor in the history of Thailand, and has been dubbed "Mr. Clean" by the press.

DID YOU KNOW? Chamlong's followers claim that he only eats ten spoonfuls of rice a day.

When he first ran for governor, Chamlong was an independent candidate, and did not align himself with any political party. Following his success in the elections, he founded his own party, the Phalang Tham (Power of [Buddhist] Teachings) Party. Since that time, the Phalang Tham Party has become very popular in Bangkok, and later expanded its sphere of activity to other provinces as well.

Transfer of power and Chatichai's government

In 1986, the government experienced internal difficulties, and Prime Minister Prem found it hard to keep his coalition together. He therefore decided to dissolve the parliament and hold new elections. The new elections, as before, gave no party the absolute majority, so another coalition government had to be formed. The government then invited Prem to continue serving in his post as prime minister. However, the new government proved little different from its predecessor. In addition to constant bickering within the government, the opposition submitted frequent no-confidence motions. (A no-confidence motion is a motion in parliament which states that the parliament no longer supports the government. If a no-confidence motion is passed, this is tantamount to firing the government.)

Finally in 1988 Prem decided to dissolve the parliament and hold new elections yet again. After the elections, he refused to be appointed prime minister for another term, saying that the time had come for the country to have an elected prime minister. The post then went to the leader of Chart Thai, the largest party in parliament. The new prime minister, Chatichai Choonhavan, had served as deputy prime minister under Prem, and in general continued the previous government's policies. Chatichai's pro-business policy contributed to the economic boom the country experienced in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The government's liberal economic policies were also expanded to include greater freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. Government censorship of the press was relaxed, and disaffected citizens could once more hold demonstrations. However, the new government quickly won itself the name of being a corrupt bunch whose members used their position to extort bribes and engage in other illegal activities. In particular, it was charged that one or two ministers ran illegal casinos, and that the prime minister's advisor on crime was himself an organized crime leader.

The 1991 coup d'état and its consequences

In February 1991 the military, claiming to respond to the people's call, staged a coup d'état. The immediate cause of the coup, though, had little to do with the people's well-being. On February 24, Chatichai decided to go to Chiang Mai and seek an audience with King Rama IX, who was then in residence at his northern palace. The generals suspected he was going to seek the king's approval for their removal, and as his airplane was about to leave it was surrounded by troops and Chatichai was arrested. Following Thai custom, he was "allowed" (actually forced) into exile for a while until the situation had calmed down.

The coup leaders appointed Anand Panyarachun, a former diplomat, as the new prime minister. They promised to hold new elections within months, and set up a special inquiry committee to investigate corruption allegations against some former ministers and other high government officials. Whoever was found to have amassed fortunes from illegal or unexplained sources during his term was declared "unusually rich." His ill-begotten wealth was then confiscated by the government.

Initially, the coup had some popular support. People were happy to see the corrupt members of the Chatichai government get their just deserts. Besides, the Anand government proved to be highly competent, prompting many to label it "the best government Thailand has ever had". However, as months went by it became apparent that the military group which had seized power and was now calling itself the National Peace Keeping Committee (NPKC) was in no hurry to hold new elections as they had promised. A new constitution was promulgated, the sixteenth since 1932,

that was not only undemocratic, but was designed to perpetuate the rule of the NPKC. It had provisions for an elected parliament of 360 representatives, and a senate of 360 members. The number of senators was later reduced to 270; however, they were not to be elected by the people, but rather chosen by the NPKC.

DID YOU KNOW? During the weeks preceding the 1992 elections, coup leader Sunthorn was preparing the list of new senators almost single-handedly. So many people came to his house to ask to be appointed to the new senate that he had to flee Bangkok to an undisclosed destination. He left a sign on his house gate asking interested parties to direct their requests to the NPKC office.

The March 1992 elections and Bloody May

Finally, in March 1992 new elections were held. The new parliament quickly divided itself into "pro-military" and "pro-democracy" blocs. It soon became apparent that the "pro-military" bloc had the upper hand. There were many allegations, however, that they managed to secure their majority by vote rigging, bribes, and coercion. Moreover, when the list of senators was made public, it became known that it was made up mostly of military and police officers, or rich businessmen who apparently received their seats in the senate in return for "contributions" to the NPKC leaders.

In the months preceding the elections, many people became increasingly worried that the military would remain in control of the government even after the elections. The supreme commander of the armed forces, Suchinda Kraprayoon, was rumored to covet the prime minister post for himself. However, Suchinda repeatedly declared that he supported democracy and would not accept the post even if it was offered to him.

After the elections, the military-backed Samakkhi Tham (Unity and Justice) Party won the largest number of seats in parliament. Party leader Narong Wongwan seemed to be the natural choice for prime minister. However, a report was leaked to the press saying that Narong was denied a visa to the United States on suspicion of drug involvement. When the State Department confirmed the report, coup leader Sunthorn withdrew his support from Narong, and the "pro-military" bloc offered the prime ministership to Supreme Commander Suchinda. Despite his pledges to the contrary, Suchinda readily accepted the post.

Another important development in the 1992 elections was Bangkok governor Chamlong Srimuang's decision to run for parliament. Not only was he elected, but thirty-three other members of his Phalang Tham party were elected as well, as the representatives of most of Bangkok's districts.

Amid accusations of continued military involvement in the government, and of Suchinda's personal breach of promise, Suchinda put together a cabinet. It included nine people not elected by the people, as well as several of the people pronounced "unusually rich" after the 1991 coup. In another surprising move, drug suspect Narong was appointed vice prime minister. Anti-government rallies, demonstrations, and hunger strikes soon broke out in Bangkok.

DID YOU KNOW? In 1992, a Thai woman brought a lawsuit against Bangkok governor Chamlong Srimuang. She claimed that since his lifestyle is like that of a monk, he should not be permitted to run for parliament, because monks are forbidden by law from engaging in politics. The lawsuit was dismissed.

On May 17-20 1992, mass demonstrations against Prime Minister Suchinda and his government were organized in Bangkok and other cities by pro-democracy parties. The demonstrations were brutally suppressed by the police and the army. Hundreds of unarmed demonstrators were killed or wounded, while hundreds of others disappeared and were presumed to have been killed. Opposition leader Chamlong Srimuang and 3,000 other demonstrators were arrested.

During the suppression of the demonstrations, the king's residence was surrounded by soldiers, claiming to be protecting the royal family. According to some observers, though, the royal family was not facing any danger, and the soldiers were actually trying to prevent the king from intervening in the crisis. Finally, the king managed to summon Prime Minister Suchinda Kraprayoon, opposition leader Chamlong Srimuang, and ex-Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda (who by now had become member of the king's Privy Council) to his residence. He ordered the three in no uncertain terms to see to that an end was put to the violence. The soldiers were immediately ordered back to their barracks, and the demonstrations were halted. The thousands arrested during the demonstrations were released, and soon life in Bangkok returned to normal. A few days later, Prime Minister Suchinda resigned, but not before signing an amnesty decree absolving himself and his accomplices from any responsibility for the Bloody May events.

Anand's Return

For weeks the country was in suspense to see who would be appointed the next prime minister. According to the constitution, it was the duty of the Speaker of the House of Representative to choose the candidate, and present his name to the king for approval. Somboon Rahong, leader of the pro-military Chart Thai party which had finished second in the elections, was rumored to be the speaker's choice. This worried

many Thais, who were afraid that the appointment of a pro-military prime minister would lead to new political violence. However, the house speaker surprised the country by proposing Anand Panyarachun, who had won wide popularity when serving as prime minister after the 1991 coup. Thais sighed with relief as press censorship was canceled, the stock market surged upwards, and peace returned to the streets of Bangkok.

DID YOU KNOW? Somboon Rahong was so certain of his appointment as Prime Minister that the day the announcement was to be made, he put on his official uniform and stayed home practicing the ceremony of receiving a royal letter of appointment and waiting for the important phone call. He even organized a large party at his house, and had TV crews invited. When the phone finally rang, the House Speaker informed the surprised Somboon that he was not appointed. Somboon immediately announced he was resigning from politics, and hurried upstairs to change out of his uniform.

As soon as he took office, Prime Minister Anand dissolved the parliament and called for new elections. In the few months left before the elections, the second Anand government managed to accomplish more for Thai democracy than all the preceding governments. Slowly but surely, corrupt military officers were removed from positions of power and control in the government and in state enterprises. This culminated in the removal from power of the last remaining leaders of the now defunct NPKC, who were all given less important positions. (The head of the NPKC, Gen. Sunthorn, had already retired and opened a Thai restaurant in Paris; Gen. Suchinda had resigned from his military post when he became prime minister, and after he resigned from the government he was left with no official position.)

As the "demilitarization" of the country was progressing, the full extent of the corruption that had reigned in Thailand became known. It seemed that the main objective of many government officials, including those in the highest positions, had been to enrich themselves at the people's expense, rather than to serve the people. In addition, many people in the government, military, and the police, took part in illegal activities such as drug trafficking, gambling, forced prostitution, illegal logging, and dispossessing farmers from their land.

For example, two Thai police generals were suspended for masterminding a bank robbery in Laos in which $2 million in U.N. development fund money was stolen. A board member of Thai International Airways (THAI) was suspected of stealing $40 million from the company, and also setting up a tour company in Australia which actually competed with THAI, using THAI funds and workers. Corrupt officials made a deal to install millions of new telephone lines in Thailand, under which they were to receive huge bribes in return for paying grossly inflated rates at the people's expense.

The deal fell through at the last minute due to the collapse of the Suchinda government, which according to Prime Minister Anand saved Thailand billions of dollars.

The September 1992 elections

The elections were finally held on September 13, 1992. During the election campaign, dozens of officials, candidates, and campaign workers throughout the country were murdered as part of large-scale intimidation efforts. In addition, very large sums were spent on vote buying. Pro-democracy parties nevertheless managed to win the majority of parliament seats, although the results were very close. A coalition was formed of the four pro-democracy parties and a fifth party which they invited to join the coalition in order to have a comfortable majority and ensure a stable government.

As the new prime minister, the coalition chose Chuan Leekphai, leader of the Democrat Party, which had won the most parliament seats. Chuan made history by becoming the first prime minister in the country's history who was neither a military officer nor came from the one of the country's elite families. He was rather the son of a middle class family with limited means, who had made it to the top through more than two decades of service as a member of parliament. His humble background as well as his incorruptibility were made even more apparent when it became known that his Bangkok home, a tiny ramshackle wooden house, was not even his, but was lent to him by one of his supporters.

Towards the future: goals and problems

The new government promised an overhaul of the country's administration and legal systems. They pledged to combat poverty in the outer provinces, which had fallen far behind Bangkok in terms of personal income; to give priority to education, which had been neglected under military governments; to combat corruption, beginning with requiring cabinet members to disclose their assets; to scrutinize the military budget, which had hitherto been secret and without any control; to remove from the legal code undemocratic laws and decrees enacted during military rule; to limit the power of the unelected senate; to decentralize the government, in order to give people in the province more say in their own affairs; and to amend the constitution to make it more suitable for a democratic country.

It should be realized, however, that it would take long years of hard work to correct the neglect and abuse of six decades. Abuse of power and official corruption had become the norm, and it would not be possible to remove all malfeasant military officers and government official as well as civil servants. They would continue

serving in the same posts, and take any number of actions to hurt the democratic government if the government tried to curtail their power. It should also be remembered that the opposition parties made a very strong showing in the elections, and would continue to be a force to be reckoned with for some time to come. Made up almost entirely of former backers of the military dictatorship politicians accused of corruption, the opposition would do anything within their power to obstruct the work of the democratic government and try to regain power. Nevertheless, chances for a stable democracy and just distribution of wealth in Thailand never seemed so good.

Summary

After the Allied victory England and France wanted to punish Thailand for its collaboration with Japan, but the U.S. defended the Thai position. In 1946 King Rama VIII came of age and became king, but died from a bullet wound in circumstances unknown to this day. His younger brother was crowned as Rama IX in 1951. Following Rama IX's coronation, Thailand was ruled by a succession of ruthless dictators, with a three-year period of democracy following the student-led revolution of 1973. In 1992 the people staged another revolution, after which prospects for a stable democracy finally taking root in Thailand seemed good.

UNIT 7 Student Activities

Debate topic

Pro-military and pro-democracy parties have both blamed each other for responsibility for the Bloody May events. Who was really responsible?

Assignments

A. Library tasks

1. When did Indochina, Malaya, and Burma receive their independence? Which independent countries did they become?

2. Summarize American public reaction to the war in Vietnam.

B. Review questions

1. Why did France and Britain want to punish Thailand after World War II? What did they threaten to do?

2. What became of Pridi and Phibun after the war?

3. How did the West react to Phibun's return to power? What influenced that reaction?

4. How was Phibun's second term in office different from his first one?

5. What were the Sarit government's achievements?

6. Why is Sarit considered to have been a corrupt dictator?

7. How did Thanom and Praphas get to power? And how did their rule end?

8. What were the causes and circumstances of the termination of democratic rule in 1976?

9. Why did some Western observers label Thanin's rule "reign of terror"?

10. What characterized the period of Prem's premiership, as opposed to previous periods?

11. Who is Chamlong Srimuang, and what is his role in Thai politics?

12. What brought about the fall of Chatichai's government?

13. What were the consequences of the 1991 coup d'état?

14. Briefly describe the rise and fall of the NPKC.

15. Discuss the causes and effects of the Bloody May events.

16. What were the major accomplishments of Anand's second term in office?

17. Why were the results of the September 1992 elections so significant?

18. What prospects and problems does Thailand face in the future?

C. Creative thought

1. In the United States, strong opposition to the war in Vietnam developed which finally ended in the U.S. withdrawing its forces. In Thailand, however, there was no such opposition movement, although Thai troops also took part in the fighting. What are the possible reasons for this lack of protest?

2. Suppose that the pro-democracy parties did not demonstrate after Suchinda Kraprayoon became prime minister in April 1992. How would the situation in Thailand be different today?

Chapter 8: Arts and Crafts

As in few other places, art in Thailand is an integral part of everyday life. On every street, even in poor slum areas, there are spirit houses--miniature masterpieces of Thai art and architecture. Every Thai home has on display at least some *objets d'art*, ranging from Buddha images to paintings, lacquerware, and silk weavings. Even ordinary trucks are decorated with paintings and engravings of angels and mythical animals. And of course every village and neighborhood has its own *wat* (Thai temple), exhibiting traditional Thai architecture and decorative arts. Art is everywhere to be seen and enjoyed.

Thai art has evolved over centuries and under several foreign influences. No doubt many of the folk arts and crafts, like basketry, weaving, woodcarving, and silversmithing, are quite ancient, and have been practiced by Thais even before their migration into the heart of Southeast Asia. Other Thai arts developed under the influence of other nations. Thai temples for example, while incorporating some unique Thai elements, also show Indian, Chinese, Cambodian, Burmese, Mon, and recently even Western architectural influence. Thai sculpture, not long ago limited mostly to Buddha images, is quite distinct from the sculpture of surrounding countries, although ultimately derived from Indian sculpture. Theatrical arts have both ancient Indian and more recent Chinese elements as does traditional Thai music.

The formative years of classical Thai arts were during the Sukhothai period (13th-16th centuries), and they were to attain the highest achievements during the Ayutthaya period (14th-18th centuries). In Ayutthaya, artists and artisans were organized into ten guilds: the painters' guild, the sculptors' guild, the engravers' guild, and so forth. The guilds were incorporated into one umbrella organization, called **Krom Chang Sip Mu** (Organization of the Ten Groups of Artisans) which enjoyed royal patronage. This organization has survived until today.

It must be pointed out though, that Thai artists were quite different from their Western counterparts in one important aspect. While Western artists strove for originality and individuality, Ayutthayan artists tried as much as possible to emulate and replicate the work of their predecessors. One interesting side effect of this self-effacing tradition is that today we know the names of few pre-20th century Thai artists.

Architecture

The most prominent classical Thai art, incorporating into it many other subsidiary arts, is architecture. Traditional Thai architecture can be roughly divided into two

separate domains: domestic architecture (of private houses) and public architecture (of temples, palaces, and other public buildings).

Unfortunately, traditional domestic architecture is fast disappearing from the Thai scene, as more and more people choose to live in Western style houses and buildings. The traditional house is built entirely out of wood, preferably teak. No nails are used in the construction: all parts are custom-made to fit into each other. If the house has to be moved, specially trained assemblers can quickly take it apart and rebuild it in a short time. The house is built on piles, usually over or near a waterway, such as a river or a canal. Some steps lead up to a small porch, from which one enters the house, consisting of one large room. The outer walls are often decorated with squares in various sizes which form a pattern. The roof is pitched, and is covered either by thatch or by square tiles. At each end there is a gable, ending in distinctive looking upward hooks. There are architectural variations on this style from region to region, usually expressed by different shaped gables.

Thai public architecture is also of ancient origin, although not nearly as ancient as domestic architecture. It probably dates back about 1,000 years, to the period when the Thais were moving into Thailand, converting to Buddhism, and establishing kingdoms, which necessitated the construction of temples and palaces. Originally, public as well as private buildings were constructed entirely out of wood, and some examples of wooden temples can still be found in northern Thailand. During the Sukhothai period, we already find impressively well-constructed buildings of bricks and plaster.

DID YOU KNOW? Thai public buildings of the late Ayutthaya period are often shaped like boats, curving upwards at both ends. The outside walls and columns are often slanted, so that the ceiling is smaller than the floor.

Windows of important public buildings have elaborate decorations and appear to be wearing "crowns." Roofs are made up of several tiers, and are sometimes topped by a spire. At the ends of the beams which support the roof there are upward hooks,

resembling the gable beams of wooden houses. These upward hooks, called *chofa*, are probably the most distinctive feature of Thai architecture.

In Thai temples one can see many types of spires or pagodas which have different origins, and can be divided into three basic types. The Thai-style pagoda is called *mongkhut*. It looks like a very tall crown with many tiers. It is usually used as a roof or roof decoration. The Burmese or Mon style pagoda is called *chedi*; it is built to house important relics, such as tiny parts of the alleged remains of the Buddha, or the ashes of an important monk. The *chedi* resembles a huge bell and is often painted gold. Finally, the Cambodian-style pagoda is called *prang*; it resembles a gigantic corncob, and is used either to house relics or to decorate roofs. *Chedi*s are only built for religious purposes, but *prang*s and especially *mongkhut*s can be found as palace decorations as well.

Glass mosaics

A feature of traditional public architecture in Thailand is glass mosaics. Tiny square pieces of glass are painted with brilliant colors, which are then coated with metal. They are arranged on the exterior of the building, glass side out, to form intricate patterns such as stylized flowers and stars. Some temples have glass mosaics only inside the roof gables, but the prominent temples and palaces use this technique more copiously. Some--like the Royal Chapel in Bangkok or the Holy Footprint Temple in Saraburi--are completely covered with glass mosaics. This gives the buildings a striking appearance, with a dazzling mixture of green, blue, red, purple, and gold.

Mother-of-pearl inlaying

Mother-of-pearl is the shiny internal layer of the shell of a certain kind of mollusk that is used in artwork. In Thailand, a snail living in the Gulf of Thailand is used. There are two techniques for making mother-of-pearl inlays. Both involve cutting tiny pieces of shiny multicolored mother-of-pearl and arranging them to form patterns and pictures. In the first method, the pieces are embedded directly into a freshly lacquered wooden surface, before the lacquer dries. In the second method, used for more intricate patterns, the artist first draws his design on a piece of paper, and then pastes on the mother-of-pearl pieces shiny side down. The paper is then pressed onto the fresh lacquer, and when the lacquer is dry the paper can be peeled off to reveal the design. Mother-of-pearl inlay designs most often include angels and floral patterns.

The art of mother-of-pearl inlaying has a long history in Thailand. Some small pieces decorated in this manner and dating back about one thousand years have been found

by archeologists. However, the art reached the peak of its refinement centuries later, during the Ayutthaya and Bangkok periods.

Mother-of-pearl inlaying is used to decorate doors and window shutters in temples and palaces. It can also be used on smaller objects, such as alms bowls used by Buddhist monks to collect food donations. Household items decorated with mother-of-pearl inlay include jewelry boxes, picture frames, and pieces of furniture. Small mother-of-pearl dishes are also produced as souvenirs for tourists.

Lacquerware

Lacquerware consists of shiny black and gold designs on wooden surfaces. The technique originated in China, but Thais developed it into a unique Thai form of art, with its own style and designs. The golden age of Thai lacquer work was during the Ayutthaya period.

Classical Thai lacquer patterns are evenly distributed over the entire surface, so that a balance between gold and black is maintained throughout. Old traditional designs usually consisted of mythological figures: angels, demons, and imaginary animals. The space around the figures was decorated with intricate floral and geometric patterns, until the entire surface was covered. Later, due to Chinese and Western influences, other designs were added to the inventory: people, life scenes, buildings, trees, and real-life animals. These new patterns did not maintain the delicate balance and even distribution of traditional Thai lacquerware.

Creating lacquerware is a complicated process. First, the wooden plane has to be prepared by coating it with the ash of a certain seed, to make the surface smooth. It is then coated with at least three layers of lacquer, a shiny black resin obtained from a particular plant. Next the artist chooses the design, and draws it with pencil on a sheet of paper. He uses a pin to go over the lines and make tiny holes along the outlines. A fine powder is very carefully sprinkled through the pinholes to copy the design onto the lacquered wood. Then, all the areas which are to remain black have to be covered with a water-soluble gum. After that is done the artist applies a fourth layer of lacquer to the surface, and while it is still wet and sticky he covers the entire area with gold leaf. The composition is left to dry for a day, and is then washed with water. The water-soluble gum washes away, and with it the gold leaf which was applied on top of it leaving gold only in areas not covered by the water soluble resin. The result is a composition of gold over a shiny black background.

DID YOU KNOW? The water used to wash lacquerware items at the end of the process is of carefully saved. Then it is strained to retrieve the gold leaf washed away.

The applications of lacquerware are similar to those of mother-of-pearl inlaying. In addition to adorning the doors and window shutters of temples and palaces, lacquerware is also used to decorate cupboards and bookcases. Lacquered cupboards were used in the homes of wealthy Thais, to store clothes and utensils. Bookcases were used to keep religious manuscripts (handwritten books) in temples.

Because the art of lacquerware is complicated and time consuming, it has declined in modern times. Few current lacquer artists are able to reach the high technical and artistic level of their Ayutthayan predecessors. Nevertheless, the tourist industry has helped keep the art alive, and lacquered boxes and ornamental plates have become popular souvenir items.

A kind of folk lacquerware, quite different from the black-and-gold lacquerware, is made in the northern province of Chiang Mai. Unlike classical lacquerware which had originally arrived in Thailand from China, folk lacquerware is Burmese in origin. It is usually used not on wooden objects but on wicker straw baskets of various shapes and sizes that undergo a coating process which turns them into jars and vases. The baskets are first covered with a sealant made of a mixture of resin and burnt rice husks. Each basket is coated up to fifteen times, until it becomes totally smooth and waterproof. Then it is coated with layers of lacquer of different colors, usually red, green, and sometimes yellow, with the last coating always being black. To decorate the finished jars and vases, a sharp instrument is used to make fine engravings on the black surface. Each line will be either red, green, or yellow, depending on the depth of the engraving. This requires much skill, because if the artist makes the incision too deep, he will reach the next layer and get an unintended color.

Painting

Thai painting probably owes its origin to Indian and Sri Lankan religious painting. However, through the centuries it has developed a unique style of its own, quite unlike the art of India or Sri Lanka. Thai painting is distinctive both in terms of techniques and materials as well as design.

There are several types of Thai painting, the most important being mural paintings that cover walls of temples and palaces. Smaller paintings are found on long cloth banners used in temple ceremonies and in paper manuscripts. More rarely, wooden surfaces were also decorated with paintings, in particular window shutters.

Thai mural painting techniques are extremely complicated and time consuming. First, the surface has to be prepared so that the paint will adhere to it and retain its original color. This is done by repeatedly applying various solutions obtained from plants and minerals. This process alone takes several weeks. Then the dyes have to be prepared. Originally, Thai artists used only five basic pigments, all from natural materials such as clays and plants: scarlet, light blue, yellow, white, and black. All other colors were obtained from mixing these five basic pigments. However, since the last century, other pigments have been used, mostly imported from China.

Painting requires many kinds of brushes, which the artist likes to make. Some are made out of the bark of one particular tree, others are made of air roots of another tree. The finest brushes are made from the inner-ear hair of cattle, and have ivory handles. A Thai painter typically uses a dozen or more brushes, to obtain different effects and textures.

The themes of traditional Thai paintings are religious and mythological. Religious paintings typically feature scenes from the Buddha's life, while mythological paintings show legendary creatures and scenes from Thai literature, most often the *Ramakian*. They depict angels, demons, palaces, and rivers, all in vivid colors which cover the surface without leaving any unpainted areas.

DID YOU KNOW? Traditional Thai painting does not have an exact perspective, making it hard for the viewer to determine which objects are close and which ones are far away. Also, figures and objects which appear in the painting have no shadows.

Thai paintings do not represent one point in time, as Western paintings do. When we look at a Western painting, say of people eating, we see them in a particular moment of their meal; but in a Thai painting, different parts of the same composition take place in different times. We can see the same character fighting, sleeping, crossing a river, and riding an elephant, all in the same painting.

Since the middle of the 19th century, traditional Thai painting has undergone a decline. The art was affected by Western influence on matters of perspective and design as well as techniques. The technical skill of the artists also deteriorated. At the same time, Thai artists started using modern techniques and compositions such as watercolors and oil paintings done on paper and canvas. While earlier paintings of

this sort were limited to Western style and themes, in recent years many Thai artists have been going back to their roots and painting modern versions of traditional Thai themes and designs.

Sculpture

Traditional Thai sculpture was limited mostly to Buddha images. Buddha images are not idols, but are rather reminders of the Buddha and his teaching. As such, their primary purpose is a religious one. But like other religiously inspired arts, such as painting, the art of sculpture also attained a high level of artistic expression.

Thai Buddha images come in every size. Some are as small as a grain of rice, while others stand as tall as office buildings. The materials from which Buddha images are made are equally varied: gold, bronze, glass, bricks, stone, clay, jade, and wood, or in short any substance that can be carved or molded. It all depends on the desired size, purpose, price, and artistic effect.

Buddha images can be classified by various criteria, the most important of which (besides size and material) are style, place of origin, period, and position. The first three criteria are closely related to each other. For example, if we say that a particular Buddha image is in the Sukhothai style, this would mean that in addition to having a specific artistic style it was also made in the vicinity of the ancient city-state of Sukhothai between the 13th and the 16th centuries.

Early Buddha images show strong Indian influence. This is not surprising, since Buddhism as well as Buddha images originated in India. Very different are Srivijaya period Buddha images, found in southern Thailand. They were cast in bronze in the 8th-12th centuries, and show Malay and Javanese features. (Srivijaya was an ancient empire in the southern part of Southeast Asia.) Dvaravati images are from the 6th-10th centuries, and are mostly carved out of stone. They are said to show Mon facial features, because they were created by Mons. Images from Lopburi show a strong Khmer influence, while ones made in the northern kingdom of Lan Na show northern Thai and Burmese features.

Sukhothai, the cradle of Thai civilization, was also the place where the art of Buddha image making reached its highest artistic peak. Many images survive from this period (13th-16th centuries), cast in bronze, carved out of stone, or molded in clay. Great attention was paid to details: a realistic looking robe, anatomically correct hands with fingers of different lengths, and a serene, smiling facial expression. Most prized are the life-size, cast bronze walking Buddhas, a Sukhothai innovation.

Images from the Ayutthaya period are of various styles. Early ones resemble Dvaravati images, with round heads and other facial features attributed to the Mons. Later ones have elongated faces, and are much fancier: they wear crowns, decorated cloaks, and many pieces of jewelry. The artists who executed these images seem to have forgotten that the historical Buddha was actually dressed in rags.

To the Western viewer, later Thai Buddha images seem very unrealistic: their ears are huge, their arms are too long, they have a strange bump on top of their head, their feet are flat, and their heels stick out. In fact, the artists did not aim at realism or anatomical correctness, but portrayed the Buddha's features in accordance with Buddhist writings which describe the Buddha as having had long earlobes extending down almost to his shoulders, arms long enough to touch his knees without bending, and so forth. In fact, modern scholars believe that these descriptions are based on misunderstandings of ancient writings.

Buddha images appear in one of a small number of fixed positions, portraying important moments in the Buddha's life. The basic classification includes standing, walking, sitting, and reclining images. Hand gestures are very significant. For example, if one hand is raised with the fingers pointing upwards, the Buddha is in the position of warding off fear and danger; if the thumb and forefinger touch, it is a teaching position; and sitting with both hands lying on the lap facing upwards is a meditating position.

DID YOU KNOW? The most revered Buddha image in all of Thailand is the Emerald Buddha, housed at the temple bearing its name in the Grand Palace complex in Bangkok. It is actually made of jade, and not emerald, as its English name implies. The Emerald Buddha has three sets of clothes woven of fine gold thread, for each of the three seasons. The clothes are personally changed by the king every four months.

Few old sculptures of anything but Buddha images have been found in Thailand. In the south, where a different kind of Buddhism was practiced in the past, some statues representing Boddhisatvas (Buddhas-to-be) have been found. In the central region, there was a tradition of surrounding *chedi*s with sculptures of elephants. A few years ago, a beautiful small statue of an elephant, made of gold and encrusted with jewels, was discovered in a crypt of a temple in Ayutthaya. It had escaped being looted by the Burmese during their capture of Ayutthaya in 1767, and had remained hidden until now. Other small sculptures depicting mythological creatures, such as *kinnaris* (half-human, half-bird) have also been discovered. Larger statues of mythological creatures decorate the grounds of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, the most popular being huge *yaksa*s or giants.

Modern sculpture saw its beginning in the 19th century, when statues of King Rama V were commissioned. They were executed in Western style, often by Western artists. Later, statues of other kings and prominent personalities were also erected. Most famous of these statues are one of King Rama V riding a horse (the Equestrian Statue) which stands in front of the old parliament in Bangkok, and the statue of King Tak Sin at the Temple of Dawn in Thonburi.

More artistic sculptures have been created by modern artists for aesthetic rather than official purposes. An Italian sculptor and art professor, Corado Feroci, in 1933 established an art school in Bangkok which later became a university. His many students and their students have been creating modern Thai statues ever since, either in Western style or in a modernized version of traditional Thai sculpture.

Ceramics and porcelain

Thailand's most famous ancient pottery comes from Ban Chiang. However, the Ban Chiang civilization long preceded the arrival of the Thais to the peninsula. By tradition, the Thai porcelain industry owes its origin to 300 artisans invited from China during the reign of King Ram Khamhaeng. This soon developed into a large industry, centered around the town of Sawankhalok, not far from Sukhothai. Plates, jars, and vases were made in Sawankhalok in large quantities and became important export items.

Sawankhalok ware was similar to Chinese porcelain of the period, but not as refined. The vessels were coated with a white glaze, and then decorated with black, brown, or blue designs. These included various animals, flowers, and geometric shapes. The most prized pieces were coated with a grayish-green glaze and decorated with fish patterns. In recent years, the art of making this green-glazed porcelain, known as celadon, has been revived both in Sukhothai province and in the northern province of Chiang Mai.

Today, visitors to the ancient cities of Sukhothai and Si Satchanalai can see thousands of bits and pieces of Sawankhalok ware scattered on the ground. According to Thai tradition, taking something away from a historical site will bring bad luck. This helps explain why so many of these potsherds can still be found on these sites.

Another kind of Thai pottery which owes its origin to the Chinese are the water jars of Ratburi province. These are very large greenish-black jars, decorated with yellow flowers and dragons. They were formally used in practically every Thai household to

store drinking water, and can still be seen in many villages that do not have potable running water.

During the Ayutthaya period a refined kind of porcelain became popular. It is known as **benjarong**, meaning "five colors", because many of the pieces are painted with five different colors. Unlike Sawankhalok ware, which was simple and meant for everyday use by ordinary people, *benjarong* porcelain was very expensive, and used only by royalty and rich people.

Traditional *benjarong* ware includes trays, bowls, and various kinds of covered jars, usually small in size. The vessels themselves were made in China and then shipped to Thailand, where local artists decorated them with various designs. These designs were mostly floral and geometric, but sometimes included figures such as angels. Then, the pieces were sent back to China so that the drawings made in Thailand could be painted in. The vessels were baked. The reason the pieces were baked in China, was that Thais during that period did not possess the technology to produce the very high temperatures needed: 1300°F for the initial baking, and 800°F for the second one. Finally, gold decorations could be added to the finished product.

During the Bangkok period, the quality of *benjarong* ware gradually declined, as did many other arts. The finest *benjarong* pieces are the rare pieces which have survived since the Ayutthaya period. However, in recent decades the art has been revived, mostly for sale to tourists but also for local consumption. Designs are mainly floral, and the previously popular angel designs are no longer used. Both traditional and more utilitarian pieces are made, for example tea cups and kettles.

Woodcarving

The art of woodcarving has probably been practiced by Thais since ancient times. Unfortunately, no early works have survived until today, because wood is a very vulnerable material, compared to carvings and engravings done in stone or metal, for example. Most older Thai woodcarvings which are still in existence are badly damaged, because they have been exposed to the elements. These are decorated doors and roof gables, which are affected by the rain and the sun. Thus, we have no examples of woodcarvings from the Sukhothai period, although we assume that they did exist.

Little remains of the woodcarvings of the Ayutthaya period because all wooden objects in the city of Ayutthaya were destroyed when the Burmese sacked and then burned the city in 1767. Some works of art which were not in the city of Ayutthaya but rather in provincial towns did survive, though; these include mostly Buddha images. Wooden Buddha images of the Ayutthaya period are very refined, and show a high degree of skill, especially in the decorations. Buddha images from this period

are very regal, they wear necklaces, earrings, crowns, brooches, and other jewelry and ornaments, all delicately carved out of wood. The superb workmanship exhibited here indicates a long tradition which developed gradually until reaching perfection. This is one more reason which leads us to believe that woodcarving has had a long tradition in Thailand, and did not spring up in the Ayutthaya period, even though no earlier examples have survived.

The best preserved examples of woodcarving are thus from the Thonburi period (late 18th century) onwards. Unlike other arts, which have declined since the Ayutthaya period, woodcarving seems to have reached new artistic heights during the Bangkok period. Examples of fine woodcarving can be seen on every street and in every village in Thailand, since it is this technique which is used to decorate the roof gables of temples. However, the art of woodcarving has many other applications.

The most magnificent examples of Thai woodcarvings have to do with royalty: thrones, royal carriages, pavilions, and palanquins used for carrying monarchs. They are built entirely out of wood, and then every inch is covered with delicate and detailed carvings. Several traditional patterns are utilized, combining geometric and stylized floral designs. Angels are also commonly used to decorate royal items.

Once the carvings have been finished, they are covered with colorful glass mosaics and gold, so that none of the original wood can be seen. However, when the carving is left exposed to the elements, the gold paint and mosaics quickly deteriorate and leave the wood exposed. Unless repainted, the wood itself will in time crumble and fall apart too. Sadly, this is what happened to many precious early woodcarvings.

Textiles

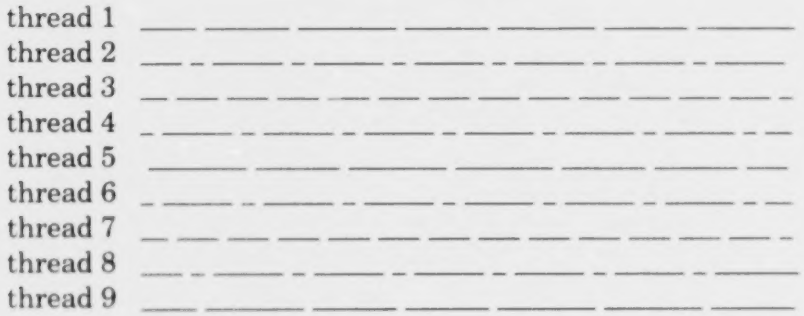
A prominent place among Thailand's cultural treasures is taken by traditional cloths. Thais spin and weave enormous quantities of cotton and silk every year, both for local consumption and for export. Much of the work is still done by hand, using traditional methods and patterns. The fabrics produced are in turn sewn into a variety of garments. Thai cotton and silk have been internationally recognized as among the world's finest, and the weaving patterns are known for their beauty and high artistic value.

Cotton weavings are made in several centers. One is the city of Chiang Mai in the north, where most Thai cotton is produced. Lamphun, another northern town, is also a center to which villagers from the surrounding areas bring their homemade cotton to be sold. Further south is the district of Hat Siaw, near the ancient capital of Sukhothai, also a weaving center. The local villagers use a variety of colors to make delicate geometric patterns of diamonds, squares, and stars. The most prized

weavings are decorated with supplementary weft (an art similar to embroidery) using thick, colorful threads, done with porcupine quills.

The most prized kind of silk in Thailand is called *mudmee* silk. The name *mudmee* means "tying thread", which alludes to the special and complicated way it is made. Unlike weaving, in which threads of different colors are woven to make a pattern, or printing, in which the design is applied to the finished fabric, each *mudmee* piece is done with multicolored threads especially prepared for it. That is why no two pieces are identical.

Each piece of thread is tied at different places and covered with waterproof material, and then immersed in a dying solution. This process is repeated several times, until various colors are obtained. If done in a carefully planned manner, when the threads are arranged in a specific order they form a pattern. Below is an example of a basic *mudmee* pattern.



This is a simplified example, though, because in weaving a real pattern you would need to use hundreds of pieces of thread to make this pattern, not just nine. And most patterns are much more complicated than this one, too. For making just one piece of silk, it is sometimes necessary to make thousands of differently dyed threads, which must be woven in perfect order for the pattern to come out. A piece with a small and detailed pattern can take months or even years to make. The easiest pattern to make is the diamond shape depicted above, and it is the most common *mudmee* pattern, and the one most women can afford. However, many other patterns exist, such as flowers, stars, elephants, interlocking keys, and various geometric shapes.

Silverware and goldware

Precious metals are used for various arts and crafts in Thailand. Decorated silver bowls are commonly used as ceremonial vessels, and among wealthier families as

dippers for drawing water from a basin. The silversmiths use tiny chisels to hammer designs onto the bowls, such as flowers, birds, and angels. Silver is also used for making a large variety of jewelry. Gold is used for making jewelry, casting Buddha amulets, and making royal vessels.

Both silver and gold are used for making *niello* or metal inlay. The patterns are either engraved on the metal or fashioned out of wire, and a black substance similar to enamel is then used to fill in the spaces between the wires. The resulting patterns are not unlike those of lacquerware. The niello making center of Thailand is the southern city of Nakhon Si Thammarat.

Wicker weaving

Several types of arts and crafts consist of weaving the dried fibrous stems and branches of various indigenous plants. Rattan (a kind of wicker) is woven to make furniture, and the leaves of the *nipa* palm are used for weaving colorful fans and mats. *Yan lipao* is the ancient Thai art of weaving baskets out of very thin fibers; it is used today mostly for making decorative boxes and ladies' purses and handbags. Fibers of different natural colors are used to make intricate patterns.

DID YOU KNOW? Because of the amount of work involved, even a small *yan lipao* box can cost hundreds of dollars, or what the average Thai earns in a whole year. Luckily, cheaper versions are also available, made of colored strips of bamboo.

Summary

Art is present everywhere in Thailand. Its origins are traced to Sukhothai, but it has been influenced by numerous foreign cultures. Thai arts reached their zenith during the Ayutthaya period. Public architecture is characterized by buildings with multitiered roofs and upwards-pointing gables. The three basic types of spires or pagodas are *chedi*, *prang*, and *mongkhut*. Many subsidiary arts, such as glass mosaics, woodcarving, mother-of-pearl inlay, and lacquerware are used for decorating traditional public buildings as well as for other purposes.

Thai painting originally consisted of murals which lacked perspective and proportions. Sculpture was mostly limited to Buddha images and statues of elephants. Both modern painting and sculpture have developed in Thailand since the end of the 19th century. Thai pottery is traced back about seven centuries to the city

of Sawankhalok, near the ancient city-state of Sukhothai. The most distinctive Thai porcelain is multicolored, gold-accented *benjarong* ware. Textiles include cotton and silk weaving, the most exquisite of which being tie-dyed *mudmee* silk. Other arts include gold and silver work, niello, and basketry.

UNIT 8 Student Activities

Debate topic

In preserving Thailand's national heritage, there are two schools of thought. One school prefers to leave ancient art objects and monuments as they are found, in order to protect their authenticity. The second school would rather restore and renovate them, so that people will be able to enjoy them as they were in the past. Which philosophy is preferable?

Assignments

A. Library task

Now that you know something about Sukhothai art, try to find out in an art history book the state of European art of the same period (13th-16th centuries). What kind of art objects were being created? Was European art of the period also religious in nature? Who were the leading artists and architects of the period?

B. Review questions

1. Where are Thais most likely to encounter traditional art?

2. What was the **Krom Chang Sip Mu**?

3. What are the two kinds of traditional Thai architecture, and how do they differ?

4. Describe the three kinds of spires or pagodas used in Thai temple architecture.

5. What are glass mosaics used to decorate? How are they made?

6. Why does mother-of-pearl inlaying require so much work?

7. What are the two kinds of lacquerware made in Thailand, and how do they differ?

8. Compare traditional and modern Thai painting.

9. In which ways are earlier Buddha images differ from later ones?

10. In which ways do later Buddha images appear unrealistic? Why were they created this way?

11. What do the different Buddha positions signify? Give one or two examples.

12. In discussing Thai ceramics, why do we not consider Ban Chiang pottery as the earliest examples?

13. What kinds of ceramics and porcelain were made at Sáwankhalok?

14. What is *benjarong* ware? Where did it originate, and what are its modern applications?

15. Why has so little early woodcarving survived until today?

16. Why is none of the wood visible on new woodcarvings?

17. What is *mudmee* silk? How did it receive this name?

C. Creative thought

Try to design a simple mudmee weaving pattern, similar to the one given in this chapter. Remember that the pattern has to be made up of a succession of parallel lines, representing threads.

D. Just for fun

Unscramble the following words to find the names of various kinds of arts and crafts mentioned in this chapter.

lenrowaile
gintinap
caterruchite
rodonvawgic
slags scimoas
littesex
maccresi
rewqualcera

Unit 9: Aspects of Thai Culture

Thai Literature

In former days, Thais did not make a clear distinction between poetry, prose, drama, dance, and music. The entire body of classical Thai literature is in verse form, so all Thai compositions may be considered to be poems. Most of them were also suitable for performing, so in this respect they were also plays. Dramatic performances in turn always included music and dancing as well.

While the distinction between literature and the various performing arts was vague, there was always a clear distinction between folk literature and classical literature. Folk literature was composed by and for the common people, whereas classical literature was written expressly for reciting or performing in the court. While until recently folk literature was purely oral, classical literature has been written down since early times. There is also a significant difference in style. Folk literature employs everyday language and sometimes even coarse expressions, and its humor is geared for the taste of ordinary people. Classical literature, on the other hand, is sophisticated and refined, and uses only the most proper language, as befitting a royal art form. Its learned Pali and Sanskrit loanwords and subtle hints and implications could be understood only by the most educated members of society, and would have been lost on the masses. (Pali and Sanskrit are ancient Indian languages in which the earliest and most important Buddhist texts are written.)

Folk literature includes folk stories, songs, plays, and various forms of ad-lib rhyming. Classical literature consists mostly of epic poems and elegant plays, recited and performed in the court. A separate genre (kind of literature) is stories with religious overtones, written in verse in order to teach people about Buddhism. These stories used to be recited by monks during the Buddhist

Lent when monks are prevented from travelling, to people who traditionally flock to temples during that season.
In modern times, the distinction between folk and classical literature has become blurred. Royal plays are published and can be read and performed outside the palace, while members of the royal family often read folk stories or attend folk performances.

Ramakian

One of the greatest (and certainly the longest) works of Thai literature is the ***Ramakian***. It is a cycle of stories about the adventures of Rama, an incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu. Although the stories are Indian in origin, the Thai version is not a translation, but was composed entirely in Thai style and verse form. And while for Hindu Indians these stories are primarily religious, the Thais regard them as no more than highly entertaining legends.

The ancient version of the *Ramakian* was lost when Ayutthaya was destroyed in 1767. After the new Thai state was established with its capital in Bangkok, King Rama I formed a literary committee in order to reconstruct the lost epic, with the king himself composing many parts. This work has proven very valuable for historical research, because the traditions and way of life described in it correspond not to ancient India, with which the writers were unfamiliar, but rather to Ayutthaya.

During King Rama II's reign, a second version of the *Ramakian* was produced. This version was specifically written as a play, and was therefore much shorter than the earlier version. Again, the king took an active part in the composition. Because Rama II was a superb poet, this second version is considered to be of a much higher literary value than the first one.

Jataka stories

Buddhists believe in the transmigration of souls. Whenever someone dies, he or she is said to be reincarnated in another body. The same person can be reincarnated an unlimited number of times, and the highest aspiration of every Buddhist is to cut the chain, so to speak, and not be reincarnated again. This state of non-existence is called *nirvana*, and only people who through their own meditation and concentration have "become enlightened" can reach it. (These concepts and others are further discussed in the next unit.)

After the death of the Buddha, many stories were composed about his previous lives before the final life in which he became enlightened and after which he attained

nirvana. There are 547 stories in all, called Jataka in Pali. While these stories, like the *Ramakian* stories, originated in India, they have been adopted by Thais. Many people in Thailand regard the Jataka stories as their most important body of literature. The Jataka stories are for Buddhists what the Old Testament is for Christians.

Of the Jataka stories, the best known ones are about the Buddha's last ten lives. Each story extols one particular Buddhist virtue as a way of teaching it to the people. Of these last ten lives, the one considered most important is the story of the Buddha's next-last-last life. It is called Mahachat ("Great Life"), and teaches the virtue of charity.

In this story, the future Lord Buddha is born as Wetsandon, the crown prince of an Indian kingdom. Wetsandon was an excessively generous person, so that when people asked him for anything he never turned them down. The most prized possession of the kingdom was a magical white elephant, which the people believed made sure there was always sufficient rain. One day, a group of Brahmins passed through the capital and stopped to talk to the prince. Hearing that there was a drought in their country, he gave them the white elephant. When the king found out about this, he was furious. He immediately summoned his son and ordered him to leave the country together with his wife and two children.

Prince Wetsandon returned to his palace, collected all his belongings, his gold and his silver, and then distributed them among the people of the city. Then he put his family on a horse-drawn carriage and left the city. But before they could get very far, he ran into another group of poor Brahmins walking along the road. He then ordered his family out of the carriage and gave it to the Brahmins so they wouldn't have to walk.

The family was now completely destitute. They had no money, no food, and no means of transportation. Finally they wandered into a forest, where the prince decided to stay and live by gathering wild fruit. One day, when Prince Wetsandon's wife was out in the forest collecting food for her family, an old man appeared before the prince. It turned out the old man's wife had heard about the generous prince who gave away everything. Knowing he could not refuse any request, she told her husband to find the prince and ask to have his children as slaves. Upon hearing the old man's request, Wetsandon called his two children and gave them away.

When Wetsandon's wife came home and found out her children had been given away, she was overcome with grief. The prince's explanation that they would earn much merit for this great sacrifice were to no avail. Finally, the god Indra, patron of the unfortunate, took pity on the woman. Fearing that the prince might give her away too, Indra thought up a scheme. First, he appeared before Wetsandon disguised as an

old Brahmin, and asked for his wife. When the prince agreed and gave her to him, Indra changed himself back to the form of a god. Then he asked Wetsandon to take care of the woman--now Indra's wife--for him. This prevented the prince from giving the woman away to anyone, because officially she was Indra's wife, and Wetsandon was only her caretaker.

Wetsandon's wife was safe for the meantime. But what about the children? The old Brahmin who had asked for them for his wife as slaves ill-treated them. Then they lost their way in the forest, and finally wandered into Wetsandon's home town, where Wetsandon's father was still king. The old king, who had by now deeply regretted having banished his son and his family from the city, recognized his grandchildren at once. He offered the old Brahmin a large amount of money in return for the children, and the poor man handed them over.

Then he asked the children to lead him to the forest hideaway of their father, Prince Wetsandon. When they found the prince and his wife--the children's parents--the king asked them to come home. They agreed and returned to the city, and the overjoyed people held public celebrations to celebrate the return of their beloved prince.

Jataka stories, and especially the Mahachat, have provided the inspiration for most of the murals which adorn temple walls. They are also recited by monks for congregants on special occasions; serve as the basis of many folk stories; and are taught in school to all schoolchildren. As a result, all Buddhist Thai are familiar with Jataka stories.

Khun Chang Khun Phaen

The tragedy *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* in its present form was composed by several poets, the most important of which were Sunthon Phu, Thailand's greatest poet, and King Rama II, who was also a great poet. Many consider it to be the finest Thai work of literature ever written. It is said to be based on a true story which took place in Suphanburi (an important province in the Kingdom of Ayutthaya) in the middle of the 18th century.

The drama tells the story of three characters: the clumsy Khun Chang, a man of unrefined manners; the handsome and debonair Khun Phaen; and the beautiful but indecisive maiden Wan Thong. All three were playmates when they were children. As they grew older, Khun Chang grew rich, got married, and led a happy and contented life. Khun Phaen left town as a boy, and became a magician and an expert in martial arts. Although he was poor, girls admired him because of his good looks

and gentlemanly behavior. As for Wan Thong, she seemed to grow prettier and prettier as time went by.

One day, a handsome young man came to town and met Wan Thong. The two fell in love with each other; only later did Wan Thong find out he was Khun Phaen, her childhood friend. Meanwhile, Khun Chang's wife died. After mourning his wife, he asked Wan Thong to marry him. Wan Thong had to choose between the two men, and to Khun Chang's chagrin she married the handsome and poor Khun Phaen.

A war then broke out, and the brave Khun Phaen was made commander of the army and sent to defend his country in battle. During the campaign, the headman of a village he defended was so grateful to Khun Phaen, that he gave him his daughter as wife. (In those days it was common for men of rank to have more than one wife.) The battle was won, and Khun Phaen came home victorious, only to find out his house had been sold in his absence, torn down, and replaced by another house. It turned out Khun Chang had spread rumors that Khun Phaen died in the war, in order to get Wan Thong to marry him. She finally agreed, after being pressured by her mother as well.

Khun Phaen was willing to put up a fight for his wife. However, when Wan Thong heard that he now had another wife, she was furious, and attacked the new wife with bitter words. Khun Phaen became angry at her, and the couple parted. Now Khun Chang had his chance, and forced the defenseless Wan Thong to marry him. After a while, Khun Phaen's anger cooled down, and he went to Khun Chang to get his wife back. Khun Chang would not hear of it, and finally Khun Phaen gave up. Wan Thong stayed with Khun Chang, who was very kind to her. Gradually, she grew to love him, but she never stopped loving Khun Phaen.

Finally, the matter was brought to the attention of the king. He summoned Wan Thong, and asked her to choose between the two men. She hesitated, and could not bring herself to making a decision. The agony and pain caused by the whole affair finally took its toll on her and she died.

Phra Lo

The drama of Phra Lo has been a popular play for centuries, and its origin has long been forgotten. In the written version of the drama, its writer is variously said to be a great king (in Thai *maharat*) or a crown prince (*yuwarat*). The explanation usually given is that it was composed by a crown prince who later became a great king. The identity of that king remains an open question, and there is an argument among scholars whether is was King Trailok (reigned 1448-1488) or King Narai (1656-1688).

The problem is that King Trailok was never given the title *maharat*, while King Narai had never been a crown prince. It might very well be that the original author was Trailok, and that the drama was later reedited by Narai.

The drama tells the story of two ancient enemy kingdoms situated in what is today northern Thailand. Phra Lo was the king of one of these countries, a handsome and happily married young man. He was an able warrior, and had killed the king of the other country in battle.

A minstrel (wandering singer and storyteller) who was travelling between the two countries was invited to perform both before Phra Lo and before the two daughters of the enemy king whom he had killed. When performing before Phra Lo, he praised the charm and beauty of the princesses; when performing before the princesses, he extolled the virtues of the valiant and handsome Phra Lo. Without ever having met, and despite the fact that Phra Lo had killed their father, the princesses fell in love with him. Phra Lo also fell in love with them, but could not meet them because of the state of war.

The two princesses then devised a scheme to unite them with their beloved. They ordered their two trusted maids to go to the forest, and ask for the help of a genie who dwelled there. The genie agreed to assist the princesses by casting a spell on Phra Lo. The irresistible magic drew the young king and two of his servants on a journey in search of the princesses, and when they woke up from their trance, they suddenly found themselves in the garden of their enemy country's royal palace.

Since it was nighttime, the guards did not notice them sneaking into the garden. But they knew that if they attempted to enter the palace, they would be killed instantly. With a sixth sense--maybe that was part of the magic spell--the princesses knew that their loved one had arrived. Accompanied by their two maids, they went out to the garden, where they were finally united with their love. The two maids who went with them also fell in love with Phra Lo's servants.

Their happiness did not last long. The group was spotted in the garden, and word was given to the princesses' grandmother. The old matron was furious that the killer of her son had now become the lover of his own daughters. She ordered the guards to surround the garden and attack the group. Phra Lo and princesses, together with their servants and maids, fought back bravely, but at the end they were all killed. Only in the wake of this tragedy did the two countries realize the senselessness of the war between them, and concluded a peace treaty.

The drama of Phra Lo is important not only from the literary point of view, but also from the historical one. It gives the modern reader the opportunity to get acquainted with the customs and traditions of a bygone era. It should be remembered that the

material culture of Ayutthaya was all but destroyed in the fire which followed the Burmese attack on the city in 1767. Therefore, apart from accounts by foreign travellers, oral literature which survived the conflagration is the best source of knowledge about the period. Because of its high literary quality and important historical value, Phra Lo is widely used as a high-school textbook, and is therefore familiar to all educated Thais.

Modern Thai literature

The father of modern Thai literature is considered to be King Rama VI, who wrote during the first decades of the 20th century. He introduced Thai readers to Shakespeare by translating *The Merchant of Venice* and *Romeo and Juliet* into Thai. Rama VI was a prolific playwright himself, who wrote many plays, tragedies as well as comedies. His comedies were about everyday people and written in everyday language, and in them he tried to invoke a sense of nationalism in his people. He taught them to preserve and respect their national heritage, while at the same time becoming a modern nation. The tragedies, on the other hand, are based on fantasies and deal with royalty and legendary figures.

Another genre Rama VI wrote in was political essays. He liked to publish articles in Siam's newspapers and magazines, always under pseudonyms (pen names). He was afraid that if he published under his own name, people would be afraid to criticize the articles, and he wanted to encourage open debate. Finally, it should be noted that besides developing modern Thai literature, Rama VI also composed many poems in traditional verse.

Actually, Rama VI was not the earliest one to create modern literature; some short stories and novels written in prose (not verse, like traditional Thai literature) were already published during the reign of King Rama V. Many of them, though, were translations from foreign languages. At any rate, it was certainly Rama VI who popularized and developed modern literature in Thailand.

Two of the early authors who achieved fame and popularity were Sri Burapha (1905-1974) and Dokmai Sot (1905-1963). Sri Burapha wrote novelettes (short books) about the life of the simple people as compared to the upper classes. His books are admired not only for their high literary values, but also for their subtle social criticism. While not directly attacking Thai society, from his stories one can get a feeling of his displeasure with what he viewed as social injustice and inequality in Thai society.

Unlike Sri Burapha, who was a commoner and wrote from the viewpoint of the common people, Dokmai Sot was born to an upper class family, and even held a royal title. She wrote long novels about the life of Thailand's high society. The books were

not mere descriptions, but also tried to analyze their heroes' mental processes and present complete pictures of the characters. A special feature of Dokmai Sot's books was that at the beginning of each chapter she quoted a passage from the Buddhist teachings which were relevant to the events.

Despite the advent of television and video, reading is still a very popular pastime in Thailand. Translated novels are very popular. In the past, Chinese sagas enjoyed the greatest popularity, but nowadays American novels have overtaken them. Original Thai novels are also published in large numbers; most of them are first serialized in magazines. Their topics are similar to those of modern books all over the world: family dramas, detective stories, love and romance. One interesting element which appears in many Thai novels is ghosts, reflecting the great interest of Thais in the spirit world.

Thai food

Food plays a very important role in the life of the Thais. Someone has said that at any given time, a Thai is either having a meal, snacking, or else planning the next meal. The abundance of fresh produce as well as herbs and spices has inspired one of the most exquisite and diverse cuisines in the world. (In fact, many gourmets consider it to be *the* best.)

The general impression Westerners have of Thai food is that it is fiery hot. While many dishes are indeed spicy, many others are not. It is quite possible to spend a pleasant vacation in Thailand, have different dishes at every meal, and avoid spicy food altogether. Conversely, after a few meals almost everyone can get used to the spiciness.

Basic ingredients for Thai food are meat, poultry, fish and other seafood, vegetables (including many kinds of leafy green vegetables), and fruit. The most important condiments are coconut milk (not juice), made by squeezing coconut pulp with water; chili peppers; fish sauce (made from anchovies, water, and salt); and shrimp paste. There is also a large variety of herbs and spices, which give Thai food its sophisticated and unique taste. These include fresh kafir lime leaves, lemongrass, holy basil, lemon basil, ginger, and coriander root, as well as many exotic dried and ground spices.

A Thai meal is always planned in order to maintain a balance between the different flavors, consistencies, and textures. A random selection of dishes would not qualify as a meal. Some dishes are only served with some other particular dishes, and never with others. Soup always accompanies a Thai meal, and is sipped spoonful after spoonful throughout the meal. It is not eaten separately like we do in the West. If

the soup is very hot, some of the main dishes have to be mild, and vice versa. There should always be a balanced proportion between vegetables on the one hand and meat or fish on the other hand. After the meal, one may have some delicious (but very sweet) Thai desserts, but often Thais simply have fresh tropical fruit, of which there is an enormous variety in Thailand.

Thais believe in utilizing all the edible ingredients that nature has to offer. This makes some dishes sound very exotic or even strange. For example, worm stew with coconut milk is regarded as a delicacy in Thailand, and steamed vegetables served with water beetle dip is a popular dish. For breakfast, many Thais like to eat noodle soup with innards (such as spleens, tripe, and stomachs) and cubes of congealed pig's blood.

Don't be alarmed, though. The great majority of Thai foods contain ingredients which are not unpalatable to Westerners. In fact, Thai food has become very popular in the United States and other countries throughout the world. You can run across Thai restaurants in Honolulu, Tel Aviv, or Amsterdam.

DID YOU KNOW? The undisputed "Thai food capital" outside Thailand is Los Angeles. According to some counts, there are three hundred Thai restaurants in that city.

The popularity of Thai food has had a positive side effect: many Asian grocery stores now carry Thai products. If there is such a store in your area, you might wish to try out some of the simple recipes given below. All of them are designed for four persons, and if cooked together they would qualify as a complete Thai meal. Whenever an ingredient is given as an alternative in parentheses, use it only as a last resort, if you cannot get the ingredient called for.

Hot and sour shrimp soup (tom yum koong)

2 cans chicken broth
3 cups water
1 can unpeeled straw mushrooms
2 sprigs lemongrass, cut into 2" sections (or 1 tablespoon dried lemongrass)
4-5 fresh kafir lime leaves
3-4 fresh chili peppers, lightly crushed
1 tablespoon Thai "chili in oil" sauce (optional)
3 tablespoons fish sauce (or two teaspoons salt)
2 tablespoons sugar
¼ cup fresh lime juice (or lemon juice)
15-20 medium-sized shrimp or prawns, peeled and deveined

In a sauce pan, combine the chicken broth, water, straw mushrooms, lemongrass, lime leaves, chili peppers, chili in oil, fish sauce, and sugar. Bring to a boil, and then simmer for ten minutes over low heat. Add shrimp and simmer for two minutes longer. Add lime juice and serve immediately.

Chicken or pork with basil (guy/moo putt guprow)

1 tablespoon cooking oil
3 cloves of garlic, minced (not too fine)
2-3 fresh chili peppers, chopped
1 lb ground chicken or ground pork
1 cup fresh basil leaves (lemon basil is the best, but any kind of basil would do)
2 tablespoons fish sauce (or 1 teaspoon salt)
1 tablespoon sugar

In a frying pan, warm the oil, then add the minced garlic and chili pepper, and stir. After 30 seconds, add the ground chicken or pork, and sauté for 5 minutes over medium heat, stirring occasionally. Add the basil, fish sauce, and sugar, and cook for another three minutes. Serve with Thai rice (see below).

Thai ice tea (cha yen)

4 cups strong tea (preferably Thai tea with star aniseed, but ordinary tea would do)
1 small can sweetened condensed milk
Plenty of ice cubes
Large straws

Prepare the tea and chill it in the refrigerator for a couple of hours. Put two tablespoons sweetened condensed milk (each) in the bottom of four tall glasses. Pour in a cup of chilled tea into each cup and stir well. Fill glass to the top with ice cubes and serve with a straw.

Bananas in coconut cream (glooay booat chee)

6 small ripe but firm bananas (or 4 large bananas)
1 can coconut milk
½ cup water
3 tablespoons sugar
½ teaspoon salt

The Thai name of this dessert means "bananas ordained as nuns", because the bananas are robed with coconut milk as white as Thai nuns' robes. Pour the coconut milk and water into a small pot, and place over medium heat. Cut bananas into two sections (or three sections, if they are large), and add to the pot. Cook for five minutes over medium heat. Add sugar and salt and cook for five minutes longer, and then lower heat and simmer for another ten minutes, stirring occasionally. Serve warm.

Thai Rice

Thai food is always eaten accompanied by rice. Try to obtain Thai rice (sometimes marked as jasmine rice); if you cannot, use any kind, as long as it is long grain rice. If your family has a rice cooker, cook the rice as it is normally cooked in your house. If you do not have a rice cooker, use the following traditional Thai method. Measure the rice, about ½ cup per person. Put it inside a thick pot, and fill the pot with cold water. Use your hand to stir the rice until the water becomes white, and then pour the water out, being careful not to let any rice grains out as well. Repeat this process four more times. Then cover the rice with water, but don't fill the pot. Put your hand flat on the rice, and make sure that the water just covers your hand. (The water level will thus be a little less than an inch higher than the rice level.) Bring to a boil, lower to medium, and cook for five minutes. Then lower the heat and simmer for ten more minutes. Remove from heat and let stand unopened for another ten minutes. The rice is now ready to be served.

The Thai Calendar

The Thai calendar, like many aspects of Thai culture, is an amalgamation of various elements from different sources. Years are counted from the date traditionally believed to be the Buddha's death in 543 B.C.. This means that in order to turn a Thai year into a Gregorian year (the one used in most countries, including the United States), you have to deduct 543 from it. Likewise, to obtain the Thai equivalent of a Gregorian year, 543 has to be added to it. For example the year in which the capital of Bangkok was founded is 2325 according to the Thai calendar and 1782 A.D. to the Gregorian calendar. The year A.D. 1994 was 2536 B.E. (Buddhist Era), and A.D. 2000 is 2543 B.E..

Surprisingly, the Buddhist Era year is not the same in all Buddhist countries, because of different ways of counting. This is a bit like the arguments going on in the West about whether they year 2000 will be the last year of the twentieth century or the first year of the 21st century. Modern scholars tell us that in fact everyone is wrong, and that the Buddha actually died about 60 years after the traditionally given date of 543 B.C.. But people prefer to stick to the old tradition.

The old Thai calendar was lunar: it was measured by the revolution of the moon, as opposed to the Gregorian calendar which is solar, or measured by the revolution of the sun. A lunar month normally has 28 or 29 days, as opposed to 30 or 31 days in the calendar. This means a Thai year only had 355 days, and every once in a while a thirteenth month had to be added to the calendar in order to catch up with the solar years which are normally 365 days long. Buddhist holidays are still celebrated according to lunar dates determined every year by the court astronomer, resembling in this manner Jewish and Muslim holidays.

No one knows exactly when the original Thai New Year was. Thais consider the holiday of Songkran to be their traditional New Year. However, according to tradition Songkran is celebrated on the 13th, 14th, and 15th days of the 5th month. This does not make much sense, because we would expect a New Year to be celebrated on the first day of the first month. It is possible that the old Thai new year was indeed on the first day of the first month, but after the adoption of the Indian Buddhist calendar, this date came to be in the middle of the year. The original date might have had something to do with the spring equinox (the day in the spring when the night and the day are equal in length), and also with the rice planting period which begins around the same time.

Confused? This is just the beginning. In his first term as prime minister (1938-1944), dictator Phibun tried to "modernize" the country by emulating the West. He had the traditional calendar replaced by the Gregorian calendar, and January 1 became the new New Year. This situation remains until today. Songkran has remained a holiday, but its date was fixed on April 13th, and is no more connected to the full moon or the spring equinox.

The months of the old Thai calendar did not have names. They were simply referred to by numbers: the First Month, the Second Month, etc. When the Thais adopted the Gregorian calendar, they did not adopt the Latin-based names of the months. Rather, they attached to the new months the names of the months according to the old Indian calendar. Thus January is called *Mokkarakhom*, February is *Kumphaphan*, etc. However, in folk tradition, there are still vestiges of the old month number systems. For example, August is considered to be the most auspicious month, because the word for nine in Thai is a homonym of the word for progress. The fact that August is today the eighth rather than the ninth month has not changed this tradition. Thai songs also refer to the festival of Loy Krathong as taking place on the "full moon day of the twelfth month," even though it is celebrated in November, now the eleventh month.

The 12-Year Cycle

Thai years are arranged in cycles of 12 years. Each year in the cycle has a special name, and is associated with a certain animal. This system has been adapted by the Thai from the Chinese. These 12-year cycles are quite important as far as birthdays are concerned. While in the West decade birthdays (such as a 40th or a 50th birthday) are marked by special celebrations, in Thailand this is done in multiples of 12 years. For example, a 48th birthday (the completion of the fourth cycle) will receive much more attention than a 50th birthday. In 1987, Thailand celebrated the fifth cycle anniversary (60th birthday) of King Rama IX with great festivities. The celebrations culminated with the royal barges--beautifully decorated boats shaped like swans and serpents--being taken out of the naval boathouse and sailed down the Chao Phraya River. It was the first time since 1932 that such a display took place. In 1992, celebrations nearly as lavish were organized throughout the country when Queen Sirikit celebrated her fifth cycle anniversary.

Thais associate certain traits and characteristics with certain years. We have listed some of them below. In which year were you born in?

Year of the Rat (1960, 1972, 1984): People born in this year are said to be hard-working, cautious, and ambitious. They stick to their plans, and will attain fame and fortune. Unfortunately, they are also stingy, although not with their friends and relatives. They get angry easily, but know how to disguise their anger.

Year of the Ox (1961, 1973, 1985): Patience and steadfastness characterize people born in this year. They are attentive to others' needs and are worthy of their friends' trust. However, they also tend to be prejudiced and stubborn.

Year of the Tiger (1962, 1974, 1986): Tiger people are sympathetic to others, but can sometimes act selfishly as well. They are slow in making decisions, but once made they stick to them. This character makes them bad gamblers: and once they start losing they don't know when to stop.

Year of the Rabbit (1963, 1975, 1987): People born in the Year of the Rabbit are easy-going, friendly, and trust others easily. These qualities win them lots of friends, but they are also easily fooled and cheated. They are not overly ambitious, but usually succeed in business because they have more luck than others.

Year of the Dragon (1964, 1976, 1988): The Year of the Dragon is considered to be the most auspicious in the cycle, and many try to get married, have children, and start new ventures on this year. Dragon Year people are honest and sincere, but can also be stubborn and short-tempered. Their courage and devotedness are said to bring them wealth and long life.

Year of the Snake (1965, 1977, 1989): People born in this year are wise and attentive to the needs of others, but are sometimes overly helpful. Snake people are often good-looking, which makes them vain. They pursue their goals tenaciously, without relying on others' advice.

Year of the Horse (1966, 1978, 1990): Love of art and entertainment guide the life of people born in this year. They enjoy beautiful things, and like to pay compliments. However, they are less than attentive when it comes to work. They are cheerful and are always good company, although their behavior is not always rational.

Year of the Goat (1967, 1979, 1991): People born in this year are shy, lack self-confidence, and do not know how to stand for their rights. This gives them the image of perpetual losers. However, they are also kind and loving, and have many talents. They can therefore achieve success despite their timidity.

Year of the Monkey (1968, 1980, 1992): People born in the Year of the Monkey are very intelligent and original. Consequently they are successful in their endeavors. However, they are very talkative and like to argue, which does not win them many friends.

Year of the Cock (1969, 1981, 1993): Hard-working, ambitious, and aggressive, people born in this year make good businessmen. However, they are too self-confident and impulsive, and might make wrong decisions. They like to spend money, which makes them generous friends, but may also lead them to bankruptcy.

Year of the Dog (1970, 1982, 1994): People born in this year are sympathetic and attentive to others. They have a highly-developed sense of justice, and make good leaders. However, once they attain high positions, they can become selfish and stubborn.

Year of the Boar (1971, 1983, 1995): Boar Year people are loving and kind. They are also honest and strong-willed, qualities which bring them success and popularity. However, they tend to be impulsive, and do not think things out.

Thai Holidays

Because of Thailand's multiethnic composition, and various influences from different sources, it has a long list of holidays and festivals. Some festivals are vestiges of the ancient time when Thais were animists, some are Buddhist holidays, some are Chinese, yet others are related to Thai historical events.

There are thirteen official holidays in Thailand. New Year's Day on January 1 is now the official Thai New Year, even though its origin is clearly Western. On the New Year, Thais like to buy gifts for their relatives and friends, and celebrate by throwing jovial parties. There are even special ceremonies in Thai Buddhist temples marking the occasion.

On the full moon day in February, Buddhists celebrate Makha Bucha the day in which, according to the story, 1,250 monks who had been ordained by the Buddha met spontaneously at the Buddha's abode without prearranging the meeting. The sermon given on that day is considered to be the Buddha's most important one.

On April 6, 1782, King Rama I founded the Chakri dynasty. Every year on April 6, Thais show their respect for the monarchy by holding special ceremonies. The holiday is called Chakri Day.

On April 13-15, Thais celebrate their ancient New Year by splashing water on each other. In some towns and villages, notably Phrapradaeng (south of Bangkok) and Chiang Mai, there are special parades and processions.

Although Thailand is far from being a socialist country, it observes the International Labor Day on May 1 as an official holiday.

May 5 is Coronation Day, commemorating the coronation of King Rama IX in 1951. Actually, he became king in 1946, after the mysterious death of his younger brother King Rama VIII, but the official coronation ceremony took place only after he returned from his studies in Switzerland to assume his duties.

On the full moon day in May, Buddhists celebrate their most important holiday, Wisaka Bucha. This is the date the Buddha was born, enlightened, and died, all in separate years, of course.

Two months later, on the full moon day in July, Buddhists mark another important sermon of Buddha: his very first sermon. This holiday is called Asalaha Bucha. The following day marks the beginning of the Buddhist Lenten season.

Mother's Day is observed on August 12, Queen Sirikit's birthday. In Thai tradition, the queen is considered to be the mother of the nation, so the coinciding of the dates is not accidental.

Of the former kings of the present dynasty, the most revered and beloved is Rama V. His death anniversary, October 23, has become a national holiday. Buddhists do not view death as a necessarily tragic event, and Thais see nothing strange about festively celebrating a death anniversary.

King Rama IX's birthday is celebrated on December 5 as Thailand's national day. Widely beloved and respected as his grandfather Rama V had been, the king's birthday is celebrated with much pomp and circumstance.

With the promulgation of the first constitution on December 10, 1932, the absolute monarchy was abolished, and Thailand became a constitutional monarchy. This date is an official holiday in Thailand, even though from 1932 until 1992 hardly any progress was made towards real democracy. The constitution itself was replaced by other constitutions no fewer than 15 times.

Finally, New Year's Eve on December 31 is also a public holiday in Thailand. At night, Thais like to have fancy parties and count the minutes to midnight, when the Thai version of "Auld Lang Syne" rings throughout the country.

Besides official public holidays, other festivals are also celebrated. Chinese New Year is observed according to the lunar calendar in January or February. Chinese shop owners close their shops for three days, and relax in the company of their families. For many, these are their only days off of the entire year.

In May, a special ceremony is held at Sanam Luang Plaza in Bangkok. It is an ancient Brahmanic rite, called the Royal Plowing Ceremony. As its name implies, the king presides over the ceremony, which involves plowing Sanam Luang with a golden plow pulled by lavishly decorated oxen. The ceremony is symbolic, and supposed to bring good luck to the country's millions of farmers during the upcoming year.

In October or early November, Thai Buddhists mark the end of the rainy season and the Buddhist Lent by holding special celebrations in which monks are presented with new yellow robes and other gifts. The presents are carried to temples in colorful processions, and the ceremony is followed by festive celebrations. This holiday is called Thot Kathin.

Finally, on the full moon night in November, Thais celebrate what is possibly their most beautiful holiday, Loy Krathong. Thais flock by the thousands to rivers and canals, upon which they float tiny decorated boats called *krathong*. The base of each

boat is made of a slice of banana tree trunk, and the sides are made of beautifully woven banana leaves. Inside the *krathong*, people arrange flowers, lit candles, burning incense, and a coin. These are supposed to be offerings to the water spirits, in gratitude for having used the water during the year, expressing regret for having polluted the water. Few sights are as breathtaking as that of thousands of colorful, candle-lit *krathong*s floating down the river.

Sports in Thailand

Thais enjoy a wide variety of sports, both modern and traditional. The most popular is soccer: during afternoons, almost every school yard and temple yard in the country turns into a makeshift soccer field, where youth gather to compete in the game. Another game that enjoys very wide popularity is badminton. Badminton rackets are found in almost Thai house, even in the villages. City people prefer to play the game at professional courts in sports clubs or in public parks. Villagers use their backyard. In recent years golfing has become a very popular activity for well-to-do Bangkokians.

Before the introduction of Western style balls, Thais used to play games with their own kind of ball, called *takraw*. It is woven out of wicker and comes in various sizes, from the size of a baseball up to a basketball. The classical *takraw* game is played in a circle. The *takraw* is thrown in the air, and the participants try to keep it from touching the ground by using their feet, heads, knees, or elbows.

A more competitive variation of the *takraw* game was developed by the Malays south of the Thai border. This game, called *sepak* ("kick") *takraw*, was later borrowed back in its new form by the Thai. It involves two teams divided by a net. Despite the advent of soccer, both forms of *takraw* are still popular in Thailand, especially in rural areas.

A sport which has been popular since the Ayutthaya period is boxing. In its Thai version, boxing is at the same time more elegant and more ferocious than its Western counterpart. The opponents move in very graceful, though quick, motions, reminiscent of other Asian forms of martial arts such as kung fu and the Malay *pencak silat*. Thai boxers are allowed to use their knees, head, shoulders, elbows, and of course fists in fighting. However, the weapons of choice are the feet. Hitting below the belt is also perfectly acceptable. There is nothing like a lethal kick in the groin to floor your opponent. This is why in the West, Thai boxing is sometimes called "kick boxing".

DID YOU KNOW? In the past, Thai boxers used their bare fists, which they enforced with rope into which ground glass has been added. Since the 1950s, Thai boxers have adopted the Western custom of wearing boxing gloves.

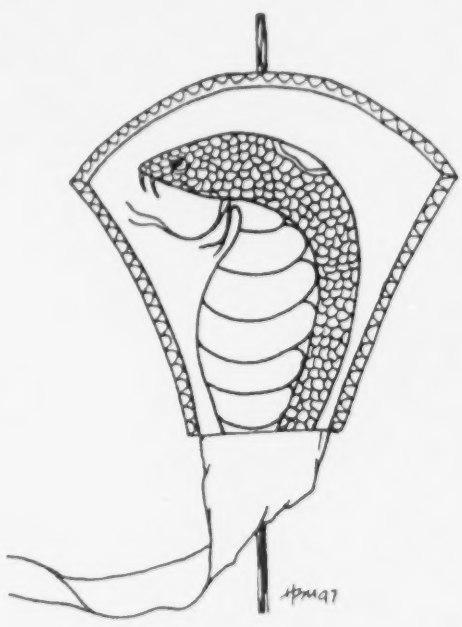
A night at the Thai boxing ring offers comprehensive entertainment. Before the match is about to begin, both opponents greet each other, and then perform a short ceremony to thank their teachers, both real and spiritual. It includes stylized dancing and bowing down with the hands put together. The game consists of five three-minute rounds, but if one of the opponents is knocked out or injured, the matchis stopped.

The fighting is accompanied by music from a live Thai orchestra. Spectators get very involved in the fighting, by shouting cheers for their favorites and gambling on the outcome of the match. They also like to feast on flame-broiled chicken, considered to be the best in boxing arenas.

In recent years, Western-style boxing has also become popular. Thai boxers like Kaosai Galaxy and Arkom Changlai have won several world championships and Olympic medals.

Gambling and eating are also an integral part of horseracing, which takes place in a large stadium in central Bangkok. Here, the famous delicacy is broiled pork.

Kite flying has been popular in Thailand since ancient times. The kite flying season is the early part of the hot season, from February until April, when winds blow steadily and constantly. During these months, the sky of Bangkok as well as the countryside is filled with colorful kites, shaped like serpents, owls, bats, and butterflies.



In Thailand, kite flying is not only a leisurely pastime, but a competitive sport as well. Two teams compete with each other by flying large kites and trying to bring each other's kite down. One team flies a "male kite", known as *chula*, while the other team flies a much smaller "female kite", called *pakpao*. The *chula* has three or five claws, while the

pakpao has a loop. The team flying the *chula* tries to use its claws in order to catch the *pakpao* by its loop and pull it down. The *pakpao* team tries to do just the opposite: use the loop in order to ensnare the *chula* and bring it down.

DID YOU KNOW? In the past, the male (*chula*) kites used to be very large, about 7½ feet in length. However, around 1950 the Sports Association of Thailand issued new regulations for kite fighting, reducing the size to about 5½ feet. This was done because the larger kites could go out of control during strong winds and become hazardous. Metal weights which used to be attached to the *chula* to increase its dragging power in the fight were eliminated for the same reason.

Summary

Thai literature today can be divided into two types: traditional literature and modern literature. Traditional literature is composed exclusively in verse, while modern literature, under Western influence, is mostly in the form of prose. Traditional is in turn divisible into classical and folk literature. Classical literature was composed for the court, while folk literature was for the common people. Some important traditional works of literature are the *Ramakian*, a collection of tales about the Hindu god-king Rama; *Jataka* stories about the Buddha's previous lives; *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*, a romantic tragedy; and *Phra Lo*, a drama of love and death. Modern literature includes novels, novelettes, and short stories, dealing with the lives of both commoners and the upper classes. Thailand's greatest traditional poet was Sunthon Phu, while its greatest modern authors are King Rama VI, Sri Burapha, and Dokmai Sot.

Food occupies a very important place in Thai culture. Thais utilize almost anything edible nature has to offer in order to create one of the world's most tantalizing cuisines. While some dishes are hot and spicy, others are mild and delicate.

The ancient Thai calendar was lunar, but modern Thais use the solar Gregorian calendar in their daily lives. Years, though, are counted according to the Buddhist era. Important anniversaries are celebrate in cycles of twelve years, a system adopted from the Chinese. Thai holidays come from various sources: ancient animistic festivals, Buddhist holidays, historical anniversaries, and international holidays.

Both traditional and Western sports are popular in Thailand. The most popular ball games are *takraw*, played with a woven wicker ball, and soccer. Badminton is also very popular, while upper class people in Bangkok prefer tennis and golf. Thai as well as Western boxing are the favorite spectator sports. Finally, an unusual Thai sport is kite fighting, in which two teams try to bring down each other's kite.

UNIT 9 Student Activities

Debate topic

Try to decide Thailand's centuries-old debate. In the drama *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*, Wan Thong is called before the king and told to choose between the two heroes, but she cannot make up her mind. Which one should she have chosen as her husband?

Assignments

A. Library tasks

1. Find out about the history of calendars used in the West, such the Julian calendar, the Gregorian calendar, and the Jewish calendar. Are they lunar or solar? How does their history compare with the history of the calendars used in Thailand?

2. How many official holidays are there in your state? Is their number greater or smaller than in Thailand? Can you categorize them, using the same categories used in this chapter to describe Thai holidays?

B. Review Questions

1. What is the difference between Thai folk literature and classical literature?

2. How was the *Ramakian* written?

3. What are *Jataka* stories?

4. Which virtue does the *Mahachat* extol? How is the story related to this virtue?

5. Who are the main characters of *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*? What is the relationship between them?

6. Who wrote the drama *Phra Lo*? Why is this a trick question?

7. What was the role of the minstrel in *Phra Lo*?

8. Who was called "the father of modern Thai literature"? What kind of literature did he write?

9. What characterizes the writing of Sri Burapha, in comparison to Dokmai Sot's works?

10. What are the requirements of a Thai meal?

11. List some of the more exotic dishes of Thai cuisine.

12. What is the difference between the ancient Thai calendar and the modern Thai calendar?

13. Where did the Thais get their system of 12-year cycles? Except for their Thai names, how are the years identified?

14. Which Thai festival takes place on the full moon night in November? How is it celebrated?

15. In sports, before the introduction of Western-style balls, what did Thais use in ball games?

16. How is Thai boxing different from Western boxing?

17. Who are Kaosai Galaxy and Arkom Changlai?

18. How is kite fighting played?

C. Creative thought

1. Try to make at least one of the Thai dishes whose recipes are given in this chapter.

Describe your experience: where did you get your ingredients? Did you have to make any substitutions? What problems did you encounter while cooking? And most importantly, how did the result taste?

2. Arrange the official Thai holidays in a table according to their categories: Buddhist festivals, historical anniversaries, traditional Thai holidays, and international holidays. Now compare your table to the results of library task 2.

Unit 10: Religion

Religion plays a very significant role in the daily life of Thais. Almost every Thai, regardless of his or her religion, performs some religious rites every day. Special occasions like weddings, deaths, moving into a new house, or opening a new business, usually entail elaborate religious ceremonies. In Thailand, there is no separation between church and state. Buddhism is the national religion and is known as one of the three pillars of Thai society (the other two are nation and monarchy).

According to the Thai constitution, the monarch is the "upholder of all religions" in Thailand, and is required to be a Buddhist. Indeed, the king and other members of the royal family often preside over religious ceremonies in different parts of the country, visit monasteries regularly, and perform religious rites in the palace. The king also appoints the head of the sangha (order of monks) as well as the highest Muslim clergyman, and gives financial support to other religions represented in Thailand. The state also provides support for building and maintaining places of worship for all religions, including both Catholic and Protestant churches.

Animism

The term *animism* refers to the religious belief in spirits which have the power to intervene in human lives. Before leaving their ancient homeland in present-day southern China and northern Vietnam, the Thais were animists. They worshipped an assortment of spirits which they believed to reside in every living thing (including plants), as well as large inanimate objects. Many folk traditions, remnants of that ancient period, are still practiced in Thailand.

The *khwan*

A central component in Thai animism is the guardian spirit or *khwan*. The *khwan* is believed to reside in every person's body and protect that person from harm. However, it may leave the body, and then the person is left without protection from danger and illnesses.

Although there are different beliefs concerning the abode of the *khwan*, most Thais believe it resides in the head. No Thai will let his head be touched, lest his *khwan* be frightened or insulted and leave the body. The *khwan* is believed to enter and leave the body through the crown of the head, at the spot where the hair twirls. People who have two twirls are said to have two *khwan*s. If the *khwan* leaves and enters the body too often, it will cause the hair to fall out, causing the person to become prematurely bald.

When people sleep, their *khwan* is said to wander out of the body. What the *khwan* sees and does is what we call our dreams. When waking someone up, Thais will be very gentle, in order to give the *khwan* a chance to return to the body, for being awake without one's *khwan* invites all sorts of trouble.

Children are born without a *khwan*, and the parents have to hold a special ceremony in order to invite the *khwan*. Guests bring special gifts in order to lure the *khwan* to come and reside in the baby's body. These are referred to as *khong khwan* or "the *khwan*'s things". Today, the expression *khong khwan* means "gifts" or "presents" in general, which shows how well rooted and important this ceremony used to be.

The *khwan* of children is said to be particularly timid, and is easily frightened. When a child cries unexpectedly, this is explained by the fact that his *khwan* had just left him. The *khwan* then has to be enticed and entreated to come back. In former times, Thais used to tie cotton threads around babies' wrists, in order to prevent the *khwan* from escaping the body through the hands.

Until recent decades, Thai children used to have their hair shaved, except for a bunch of hair at the top of the head, known as the **top knot**. This was also done in order to prevent the *khwan* from leaving the body. At the age of nine, eleven, or thirteen, there would be a special ceremony during which the top knot was shaved off. By then, the *khwan* was considered to be well established in the body, so there was no more need to keep it tied in. This top knot shaving ceremony marked the transition from childhood to adolescence.

Buddhism

With hundreds of millions of followers all over the world, Buddhism is one of the world's major religions. It was founded about 2,500 years ago in the area now known as southern Nepal and northern India by an Indian prince called Siddhartha Gautama. From there it spread southwards to Ceylon, eastwards to China and Tibet, and then to other areas of East Asia and Southeast Asia.

When the Thais moved into the area known today as Thailand, the first people they encountered were the Mons. The Mons had a highly developed culture, and the newcomers, while asserting their control over the old inhabitants of the land, also adopted many aspects of their culture. One important aspect was the Buddhist religion.

Although some Mons were Hindus, most had early on converted to Buddhism, and followed a denomination called Theravada Buddhism. Of all the different sects of Buddhism, it is the one most closely adhering to the original form of Buddhism as

taught by the Buddha. (*Theravada* means "doctrine of the elders".) It is characterized by a high sense of morality with an emphasis on individual behavior, but with very few rituals. Today Theravada Buddhism is the dominant religion in Sri Lanka, Burma, Cambodia, and Laos, as well as in Thailand.

Later, Thais came in contact with another form of Buddhism, called Mahayana Buddhism. This kind of Buddhism, practiced today mostly in China, Mongolia, Japan, and Korea, is more formal and has strict rules and many rituals.

Who was the Buddha?

According to Buddhist teachings, the founder of Buddhism was Siddhartha Gautama, the crown prince of an ancient kingdom located in what is today southern Nepal. Bored with his meaningless life of luxury, he left the palace and embarked upon a life of wandering and searching for the truth. After years of disappointment with various experiments, he finally formulated his philosophy (or "was enlightened", as Buddhists call it) at the age of thirty-five. He then started travelling and teaching his philosophy to others. Quickly the prince, now known as the Buddha (awakened one), had a large following. By the time of his death at the age of eighty, he had founded a new world religion.

The *sangha*

During his life, the Buddha established the Buddhist order of monks, known by its Indic name, *sangha*. The *sangha* provided people who were displeased with various aspects of their lives with an alternative way of life. The *sangha* expanded with the spread of Buddhism, and continues to function today.

Members of the *sangha* have traditionally all been men, although the Buddha himself did not exclude women. They have few personal belongings beside the yellow or orange robes which serves as their only garment. (Yellow and orange were probably chosen because in ancient India these colors characterized the dress of poor people.) Monks also shave their

heads, and in Thailand even their eyebrows. This is because they are not supposed to concern themselves with mundane things like clothes and hairstyles.

Similarly, monks are not supposed to have money, although in effect all do: there is just no way to manage without it in the modern world. However, they do try to avoid eating, wearing, or using anything which is not given to them. Early every morning, monks can be seen walking along streets with their alms-bowls, to collect food. People stand along the streets with trays of rice and food, which they present to the monks.

Many (if not most) Thai males become monks for at least one period in their life. Being ordained as a monk is seen as an opportunity to get away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life and devote oneself to study and meditation. It is also a way to "make merit", or accumulate good deeds which will earn one or one's relatives credit in the next life.

Unlike the tradition of other religions, Buddhists may be ordained or leave the monkhood whenever they please. Only few choose to remain monks for their entire life; the majority prefer to leave the monastery after a short period and resume their normal lives. Most commonly, Thai men become monks when they are about to get married, because they know that with the responsibilities of supporting a family, they might never again have a chance to do so. The Thai government encourages this practice by giving a paid leave to government employees who wish to be ordained for a limited period.

Three months has traditionally been the average time a Thai man would spend as a "temporary monk". This is usually done during the Buddhist Lent, which takes place in the rainy season. During this period monks do not venture out of their monasteries for long trips, and devote most of their time to study and meditation. However, in today's hectic world, many men cannot afford staying away from work for three months, and some serve for as little as three days.

Being ordained a monk has several purposes. First of all, it is an opportunity to "make merit". Secondly, it is an opportunity to seriously study Buddhist teachings, for which normal everyday life leaves little time. And finally, Thais regard the monkhood as a purifying experience, which prepares one for major undertakings such as marriage or joining the army.

Some basic Theravada Buddhist concepts

Theravada Buddhists do not regard Prince Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of their religion, as a god; they rather see him as what he was--a mortal human being. Nor do they honor him with the distinction of having been the only Buddha, or "enlightened one". According to Buddhist teachings, there had been thousands of other buddhas both before and after Gautama. He is rather regarded as an exceptional teacher, who formulated a clear philosophy of how to improve one's life and then spent his life teaching it to others. By focusing on people instead of on God or gods, Buddhism diverges from other major world religions such as Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

A central concept in Buddhism is **moderation**. The Buddha started out as a rich prince, living a life of luxury and self indulgence. He rejected that life because it did not bring him happiness. After leaving his home, he became a nomad who mortified himself by fasting, wearing rags, and avoiding any comfort. He rejected that life as well, as it too did not bring him happiness. Finally he adopted what Buddhists call the **Middle Way**: doing everything in moderation.

Another basic concept is called ***dukkha*** (this word, like many other Theravada Buddhist terms, comes from Pali, an ancient Indian language.) It signifies all that is negative in life: pain, suffering, sadness, longing, and unhappiness. According to Buddhism, life consists mostly of *dukkha*. The aim of Buddhism is to eliminate *dukkha* by eliminating its causes.

This is where another important Buddhist concept comes in: the idea of **cause and effect**. Buddhists believe that everything has a cause, and every action has an effect. If you eliminate the cause of an action, you also eliminate its effect; likewise, if you commit no bad action, there will be no bad effects. Buddhist precepts are aimed at

eliminating *dukkha* through a combination of refraining from bad actions (which are the cause of *dukkha*) and doing good deeds (which bring about positive effects.)

A related idea is the belief in the **transmigration of souls**. Buddhists believe that when one dies, one's soul is reincarnated in another body. If the deceased did good deeds during his or her life, their next life will be better than the former one. However, if one did evil deeds, he or she will be worse off in his next life. Rebirth, even if it represents an improvement over the previous life, is not considered to be a positive thing, since any life is essentially filled with *dukkha*. Birth, death, and rebirth are a neverending circle; the ultimate achievement for Buddhists is to break that circle and "become enlightened". If they succeed in breaking the circle, once they die they will not be reincarnated, but instead will attain ***nirvana***. Nirvana is the state of non-existence of both body and soul.

"**Making merit**" is very important in the life of Thai Buddhists, and involves doing good deeds. Because of the principle of cause and effect, they believe that any good deed will ultimately benefit its doer, if not in this life, then in a next life. There are two kinds of good deeds: good deeds towards other people, such as giving money to poor people or helping sick people, and religious good deeds, such as donating money to a temple.

The most common way of making merit is giving food to monks who walk along the streets in the morning. On special occasions, Thais also go to temples (although there is no religious requirement to do so), and present monks with everyday necessities, such as soap and toothpaste. After meditating in an assembly hall, many also put some money in a collection box, for the upkeep of the temple. Becoming a monk, even for a short period, is another form of merit making, as we have noted above.

Principles of Buddhism

Buddhism has a set of principles, the most important of which are organized in three groups: the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, and the Five Precepts.

In order to be a Buddhist, one has to accept the Four Noble Truths. They are:

1. Life consists mostly of *dukkha*;
2. The cause of *dukkha* is craving;
3. In order to avoid *dukkha*, you have to eliminate its cause: craving;
4. The way to stop craving is to follow the way set forth by the Buddha.

The Buddha's way is in turn made up of eight elements, called the Eightfold Path. The eight elements are:

1. Right view;
2. Right decision;
3. Right pronouncement;
4. Right conduct;
5. Right livelihood;
6. Right effort;
7. Right mindfulness;
8. Right mental exercises.

One has to start with having the right views or thoughts; based on these views, one may reach a right decision, commit oneself to this decision by saying it out loud (right pronouncement), and behave according to that commitment (right conduct). One should earn one's living justly through a right livelihood, make an honest, right effort to do everything properly, be aware or mindful of what one does, and practice meditation or right mental exercises.

Finally, there are five basic rules of conduct to which good Buddhists are expected to adhere, which are known as the Five Precepts. They are:

1. Do not kill;
2. Do not steal;
3. Do not lie;
4. Do not commit adultery;
5. Do not take intoxicants (alcohol, drugs, etc.).

Needless to say, not all Buddhists follow these rules strictly. But the Five Precepts do serve as a moral guideline, known to all Buddhist Thais and respected by most.

DID YOU KNOW? While laymen (ordinary people) are expected to abide by the Five Precepts, Buddhist monks have no less than 227 precepts to follow. This is because their ultimate aim is not just to eliminate suffering in their present life, but to "be enlightened", attain nirvana, and avoid being reborn.

Thai temples

Every town or village in Thailand where Buddhists live has a Buddhist temple, called *wat* in Thai. These temples serve a variety of purposes and functions in the life of the

community, both religious and secular. Unlike Christian churches and monasteries, Thai temples do not belong to the monks or the Buddhist "church", but are rather the property of the whole community. After all, they are built on community land using community funds, and often members of the community participate in the actual construction of temple buildings. The temple is maintained mainly through contributions from the public; because Thailand is still a developing country, the government can only offer limited support.

The term *wat* refers to the entire temple complex, which includes several buildings. The most important building is the *bot*, which is used for ordination ceremonies as well as for the monks' daily prayers, meditation, and review of their own deeds. It is a long, empty hall, at the end of which is a Buddha image on which the monks focus during meditation. (To Westerners it may appear as if the monks were worshipping the image or praying to it, but this is not so.) The only piece of furniture is a preaching chair, where the abbot or other high-ranking monks may sit while giving a sermon. The monks themselves sit on the floor. Although the *bot* is meant primarily for the monks, visitors may enter it freely when it is not in use.

Around the *bot* are eight upright boundary stones, called *bai sema*. The area demarcated within the stones is considered sacred, and therefore worthy of having ordination ceremonies. The boundary stones are also important from a historical point of view, since they allow experts to date the *bot*. That is because the shape and decoration of the stones changed significantly from one period to the other. While the building itself may undergo periodic renovations, the original boundary stones are usually kept.

Second in importance in the temple complex is the *wihan*, where important Buddha images are kept. Its shape is quite similar to that of the *bot*, and it, too, has a Buddha image at its end.

The *sala* is an open pavilion, which has an elevated (usually wooden) floor and a roof, but no walls. It is where people gather to pray and meditate, or to listen to sermons.

Around the temple complex, some spires or pagodas can be found. Those shaped like a bell are called *chedi*, and contain holy relics or remains of important monks or leaders. The elaborate bell shape topped with a spire is ultimately derived from ancient Indian burial mounds. Their architectural style was adopted by the Thais from the Mons, the Burmese, and the Sri Lankans.

A very different looking pagoda is the *prang*, adopted from the Khmers. It looks like a huge corncob, and has developed from a certain kind of Hindu monument. Originally, *prang*s symbolized fertility, but now their use is similar to that of *chedi*s. In addition to large assembly halls, all temples have small wooden huts which serve as the monks' houses. They are called *kuthi*. The area where the *kuthi*s are situated can be identified from afar by the yellow robes which the monks wash daily and hang in front of their residence.

DID YOU KNOW? There is one temple in Thailand which does not have any *kuthi*: the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok. That is because it has no resident monks, a vestige of former days when no males except for members of the royal family could reside within the Grand Palace complex, where this temple is situated.

In some temples, the holy Buddhist scriptures are kept in a special building called *ho trai*. It is traditionally built on tall poles, or piles, over a pond. This is done in order to protect the building and its precious contents from fire.

Many Buddhist temples also have a crematorium. Buddhists do not bury their dead, but cremate them in special ceremonies. Crematoria are similar in shape and size to assembly halls, but there are usually benches for the deceased's friends and relatives to sit on during the long funeral ceremony (which can last weeks) and the cremation. Also, instead of a Buddha image at the end of the hall, there is an elevated stand to hold the coffin, and behind it--the furnace.

The role of temples in Thai life

Thai Buddhist temples or *wat*s have a variety of religious functions. This is where people from all walks of life come to meditate and seek advice. Others come in order to "make merit" by contributing food, money, or everyday items to the temple and the monks. It is also where young men come to meditate and purify their minds before getting married. Upon death, all Buddhist Thais are taken to a temple for their last rites and cremation.

However, the role of the temple in the everyday life of Thais is much more than just religious. Its primary function is that of a community center. Most villages and neighborhoods have no other place of assembly. When the village council wants to meet, they will use the assembly hall of the temple. Whenever elections are held, the polling booths are placed at the temple. When a high government official pays a visit to the community, he will be received in the temple.

DID YOU KNOW? There are over 33,000 Buddhist temples in Thailand. If someone wanted to visit a different temple every single day, it would take him more than 90 years to see all of them!

In former days, temples were also where children went to be educated. Until the beginning of this century, education was not compulsory; even so, many parents sent their children (especially boys) to the temple for a few years, so the monks would teach them basic skills such as reading and writing. In some temples, actual schools were opened. When the government decided to introduce compulsory education in the provinces, they started by turning temple schools into government schools. Today, many of the country's elementary schools are still located in temples.

Temples also serve as cultural centers. In the past, art was mostly religious in nature. For example, painting was used mostly on temples walls, and usually described the Buddha's life, while sculpture was limited mostly to Buddha images. People who wanted to enjoy art could go to the temple, where they could also see other such works of art as sculptures, woodcarvings, and glass mosaics. And if people wanted to become artists, the only place they could receive training was the temple.

Sports and recreation is another function of the temple. Often the temple yard is the only open public area in the village or neighborhood. Young people like to come there on weekends and weekday afternoons to play soccer or *takraw* (a Thai game which uses a wicker ball). During temple fairs, it is also customary to stage Thai boxing matches in the temple yard.

Before the advent of radio, television, and movie theaters, performances were available to the general public at temples. Every year the community would put on a big fair in the temple grounds where people could enjoy performances of music, dancing, and drama. This practice continues today, and in villages the temple is still the only place where you can listen to a live concert or watch a movie. Besides annual fairs, rich people who wish to show their gratitude for success in business sometimes sponsor additional shows throughout the year.

Until very recently, Thailand had no government-sponsored social welfare, and even today the national social security is only at its initial stages. Fortunately, jobless and hungry people could always turn to the temple for help. For example, if an old man has no relatives or someone to take care of him, he can become a monk, and know that he will always have food to eat, clothes to wear, and a place to live.

According to tradition, women cannot join the *sangha*. However, this does not mean they cannot join a temple or enjoy the social welfare offered there. If a women wishes to renounce her worldly life and seek enlightenment, she may become a *mae chee*.

Sometimes this term is translated as "nun", but *mae chee*s are actually pious women who resides in a temple without being ordained. They are not bound by the 227 precepts of male monks (in fact they have only eight), nor can they perform religious functions as monks. But it gives old women the opportunity to look for refuge in a temple just like their male counterparts. *Mae chee*s can be identified by their shaven heads and white robes.

Muslims

The largest minority religion in Thailand is Islām, whose adherents are known as Muslims. Islam was founded by the prophet Muhammad in Arabia in the 7th century A.D. It is centered around the belief in one God, and the teachings of Muhammad. The credo (confession of faith) of Islam is "There is no god but Allah (God); Muhammad is Allah's messenger." Like orthodox Judaism, Islam in its strict form governs all aspects of life: how to dress, what to eat, even how to go to the bathroom. In this respect it is radically different from Theravada Buddhism, which requires little of the believer other than refraining from harming others. Islam (again like Judaism but unlike Buddhism) also prohibits the making or display of pictures or statues, which it regards as idolatry.

Islam reached Southeast Asia about a thousand years ago with Arab and Persian merchants. It was first adopted by local inhabitants in parts of Indonesia, and arrived at the kingdom of Pattani (located in today's southern Thailand) some centuries later. The people who lived in Pattani were Malays, who had earlier been Hindus and Buddhists. By the end of the 17th century the conversion to Islam reached its climax when the king of Pattani converted together with his family.

The inhabitants of the southernmost part of Thailand are still mostly Muslim-Malays, and constitute the bulk of Thailand's estimated 2.5 million Muslims. In this region, *qadi*s (Muslim judges) still have legal authority in matters concerning marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Other legal rights of Muslim-Malays in the south include getting days off of work and school for Muslim holidays, and a four-month paid leave in order to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, Islam's holiest city.

Beside the Malays, there are a few other much smaller Muslim communities in Thailand. In the central region, especially in Bangkok, there are ancient Arab communities of Iranian, Indian, and Arab Muslims. The founders of these communities came to Thailand during the Ayutthaya period, and many attained high positions in the Thai government. In the north, there is also a small community of Muslims from Yunnan in China.

The official leader of Thai Muslims is appointed by the king and bestowed with the special title of *Chularajamontri*. His chief duties are to represent the Muslim community in the court, to serve as president of the National Muslim Council, and to determine the dates of the fasting month of Ramadan and of the Muslim holidays according to the moon. Sometimes the exact date of a holiday is not known until the night before it is supposed to take place.

There are two kinds of Muslim places of worship: the *masjid* and the *jami'*. Although in English we refer to both kinds as mosques, there is an important difference between the two. While the *masjid* is a small prayer house which can be used only for everyday prayers, the *jami'* is a large house of prayer where the entire community gathers on Friday afternoon to worship together and listen to the weekly sermon. The status of *jami'*s in Thailand is similar to that of Buddhist temples. They are built on community land with community funds, and receive some government assistance. Their functions are similar in that *jami'*s have various social and educational roles in addition to religious ones. However, there are no paintings or sculptures in mosques, nor do they serve as centers for performing arts, because these are prohibited by Islam.

Christians

The first Christians to arrive in Thailand were probably the Portuguese, who in the 16th century established trading colonies in various locations in Southeast Asia. It is they who first introduced the Christian religion to the Thais, still attested by the fact that the Thai word for "(Christian) mission" is a loanword Portuguese. The Portuguese were followed (in this order) by the Danes, the Dutch, the French, and the English.

The first organized efforts to convert Thais to Christianity were made in the late 17th century, during the reign of King Narai of Ayutthaya. In 1662, the king allowed French Catholic priests to open a mission in the city and preach their religion. Later, he exchanged several delegations with King Louis XIV, and appointed a Greek convert to Catholicism as his prime minister. However, many Thais became weary of the prime minister and his French missionary friends. After King Narai died in 1688, the French mission was shut down and the French troops who were stationed in Bangkok were expelled. Relations soon returned to normal, and the French priests were allowed to continue their missionary work.

DID YOU KNOW? According to an old anecdote, the first French mission of Jesuit priests to arrive in Thailand was given a reception in a Thai Buddhist monastery. After sharing a meal together, the hosts made welcoming remarks in which they praised their French guests and their Christian religion. The priests, feeling that

they were about to make the conversion of their life, responded by inviting the Buddhist monks to become Catholics. The monks didn't lose their cool, and replied that they would be happy to, just as soon as the Catholic priests converted to Buddhism...

Efforts to convert Thais to Christianity continued through the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, and are today stronger than ever, with many missionary groups active throughout the country. In order to attract converts, the missionaries opened schools and hospitals all over Thailand, and greatly assisted in the country's development. The Thais received the missionaries hospitably, and readily accepted their help. King Rama IV befriended several missionaries, studied European languages and sciences with them, and even invited them to give lectures at the monastery where he was abbot prior to becoming king. Many Thais receive medical treatment at mission hospitals and send their children to mission schools. However, few have converted.

Today, after three centuries of intense Christian missionary work, its rate of success has been rather low. The number of Christians in Thailand is about 250,000, representing less than .5% of the total population. Among these, the number of ethnic Thais is negligible: most of these Christians are either members of minority groups or are foreigners who had been Christians before coming to Thailand.

The oldest and largest church in Thailand is the Roman Catholic Church, which enjoys a following of more than half of the country's Christians. Second is the Church of Christ in Thailand, an association of Protestant churches and organizations. Both churches enjoy royal support, and have been granted tens of thousands of acres of land all over the country by the king in order to build their churches and institutions. More recently other churches, such as Seventh Day Adventists and Mormons, have also been established in Thailand.

Religious syncretism

The term *syncretism* means reconciling different ideas, such as religious beliefs. In Thailand, while most of the population follows Theravada Buddhism, there is hardly a Buddhist who does not also follow some non-Buddhist practices. For example, the Buddha spoke against witchcraft, yet no people are fonder of charms and amulets than the Thais. To make it worse, the amulets regarded as the most powerful are shaped like the Buddha! The Buddha also disapproved of soothsaying, yet Thais flock to seek the advice of fortune-tellers. The most popular fortune-tellers are none other than highly respected Buddhist monks. The belief in fortune-telling and amulets is said to be a holdover from pre-Buddhist times, or the result of influence from other religions.

The belief in powerful ghosts and spirits is also very widespread, even among the most educated of Thais. Thai Buddhists still believe in the existence of the *khwan*, and keep performing ceremonies associated with it. They have no qualms about publicly celebrating non-Buddhist holidays, such as Songkran, Loy Krathong, and even Christmas.

Brahmin and Hindu influence, either direct or via Khmer-style Mahayana Buddhism, is very apparent. When building a new house, it is customary to invite a high Brahmin to preside over the installation of the spirit house. This is a miniature house erected on a pole in front of the house. According to the belief, every plot of land has a guardian spirit. If a special spirit house is not built for this spirit, it will move into the real house and haunt its inhabitants.

Hindu gods, if not actually worshipped, are revered by Thais. Every Thai is familiar with the exploits of the hero god Rama through the classical Thai epic *Ramakian*. Hindu gods are considered to be the patrons of different trades. For example, the elephant-headed god Ganesha, patron of the arts, is the emblem of the Department of Fine Arts. The name of the god Indra is used as part of the last name of many Thais. The sun and the moon are no longer referred to by their old Thai names, but are called by the Indian terms for the moon-god and the sun-god.

In recent years, it has become popular in Bangkok's shopping centers to celebrate the more commercial aspects of Christmas. Shops are decorated with poinsettias, wrapping paper is all green and red, Christmas carols are played everywhere, and some shops even hire Santa Clauses to entertain the children of customers.

To Thais, there is nothing strange about freely borrowing elements of other religions. They have always been very receptive to influence from others, adopting and adapting cultural features from the Mons, the Khmers, the Indians, the Chinese, and Westerners. They feel proud and confident of their Thainess, and are not afraid of change. Their religious outlook is similar: unless there is something greatly offensive or contradictory to Buddhism in a particular belief, they will not reject it outright. Moderation, in its Buddhist sense, seems to guide them here too: Thais would never renounce Buddhism, but neither do they object to outside influence, if it is in good measure.

Summary

Religion plays a very important role in the everyday life of Thais. There is no separation of church and state in Thailand, and the king, while supporting all religions, is required to be Buddhist. Before migrating to Thailand Thais were animists, but they later adopted Theravada Buddhism from the Mons. The *sangha* or order of monks is of utmost importance in the teaching and practice of Buddhism. Buddhism is not centered around worshipping gods, but rather focuses on people. Its central ideas are moderation (the "Middle Way") and the law of cause and effect. The goal of Buddhists is to eliminate suffering by eliminating its cause, craving. The ultimate achievement is "being enlightened" and attaining nirvana. Buddhists believe in reincarnation, and "making merit" in order to improve their lot both in this life and the next. There are 33,000 Buddhist temples in Thailand which serve many functions in addition to being religious centers.

The largest minority religion in Thailand is Islam. Most Thai Muslims are of Malay descent and live in southern Thailand. Christianity has a very small following, despite centuries of vigorous missionary work. Traditional Thai moderation and openness to foreign influence has led to a high level of religious syncretism.

UNIT 10 Student Activities

Debate topic

On the whole, is missionary work good or bad for the community which it targets for conversion?

Assignments

A. Library tasks

1. The idea of *nirvana* is very poorly understood in the West. Look up the word *nirvana* in at least two dictionaries, and describe how the definitions which you have found different from the one given in this chapter.

2. Compare the Five Precepts to the Ten Commandments. Are any precepts similar to any commandments? Which Precepts have no equivalent commandment, and vice versa? How many of the commandments tell you to do something, and how many tell you to not to do something? How about the precepts?

B. Review questions

1. What is animism?

2. According to Thai belief, when and how does the *khwan* enter the body?

3. What is a top-knot?

4. How and when did the Thais become Buddhists?

5. What are the major sects of Buddhism, and where are they practiced?

6. How was Buddhism founded?

7. What roles does the *sangha* play in Thailand?

8. Explain the idea of *dukkha* in Buddhism.

9. How do Thais "make merit"?

10. What kind of buildings are found on the grounds of Thai temples?

11. Thais use temples for other than religious purposes as well. Describe some of these purposes.

12. What is the largest Muslim group in Thailand? How did this group get to be in Thailand?

13. What kind of work have Christian missionaries been doing in Thailand?

14. How does religious syncretism manifest itself in Thailand?

C. Creative thought

1. Christians missionaries have had little success in Thailand, despite the fact that Thais are open to change and have received the missionaries hospitably. In fact, Thailand has proportionately fewer Christians than any other country in Southeast Asia. Can you think of any reasons for this interesting phenomenon?

D. Just for fun

Unscramble the following terms and names, which all appear in this chapter:

1. havardeat
2. ascue dan ceftef
3. vefi streppec
4. dreantoomi
5. hawnk
6. pot tonk
7. thadardish
8. limmus-slayam
9. sornaismisie
10. petlem

Unit 11: the Economy

King Ram Khamhaeng's inscription gives us an idea of what ancient Thai economy was like. The general impression is that of a prosperous and free economy: there is an abundance of fish in the water and rice in the fields, and no taxes are imposed on travel or trade. In modern Thailand--as in most other countries--taxes have become a necessity, but the main features of the Thai economy have not changed through the ages. Although occasionally the government tried to implement far-reaching economic policies--for example, keeping rice prices artificially low in order to help city dwellers--overall the Thai economy has remained free of excessive government interference, especially since the 1960s. Since that period, Thailand has enjoyed one of the fastest economic growth rates in the world.

Traditionally, Thai economy has been predominantly agrarian (based on agriculture). While agriculture still forms the base of the Thai economy, recent years have seen a rapid industrialization. More and more factories are being built and expanded, and as a result more people are working in factories and more industrial products are being made. A side effect of industrialization is rapid urbanization: more and more people are moving from villages to towns, where most factories are located. Trade, which has always played an important role in the Thai economy, is also expanding.

The modern economy

Today Thailand is moving away from exporting primary products, and towards producing more manufactured goods. Primary products are products which are sold as they are harvested or mined, without being processed or made into other goods, for instance rice, coconuts, wood, tin, and shrimp. Manufactured goods are made in factories, and include canned food, furniture, machines, and clothes. The government is actively supporting this change, because the profits on manufactured goods are much higher than on primary products. Because profits in the industrial sector are higher than in the agricultural sector, wages also tend to be higher. This in turn leads to a rise in the workers' standard of living.

Thailand's chief primary product exports are rice, cassava (a starch-rich tuber), rubber, corn, and tin. Among manufactured goods, textiles (fabrics and clothes) are the most important, and in fact have overtaken rice and cassava. They are followed by food products and electrical and electronic equipment.

Agriculture

Agriculture is the backbone of the Thai economy. Four out of five Thais depend on it for their livelihood, and most of the country's exports are agricultural products. A number of factors have contributed to the success of agriculture in Thailand. First of all, most of the country is arable, with the central plains being particularly fertile. Secondly, the tropical climate in Thailand, which is warm all year round with plenty of rain, is conducive for growing crops. A third factor is the abundance of water sources--rivers, creeks, and marshes. A fourth factor is that, over the centuries, Thai farmers have developed effective cultivation methods, including communal help during the harvest seasons. Finally, throughout most of its history Thailand enjoyed good trade relations with other Southeast Asian countries, as well as with China, Japan, and the West. Smart diplomacy and good marketing of its products have also contributed the economic success of Thailand's agriculture.

The irrigation or water supply system also plays an important role in Thai agriculture. In the mountainous areas, dams have been built to create large reservoirs, from which water can be supplied to farmers. In the central plains, especially in the Chao Phraya basin, an extensive canal system has been dug, bringing water to every village. This has reduced the farmers' dependence on the less reliable rainwater and seasonal flooding.

Subsistence vs. cash crop agriculture

There are two basic types of agriculture: subsistence agriculture and cash crop agriculture. Subsistence agriculture means that the farming family basically supplies its own needs: it grows rice and vegetables, and raises chickens or cows, enough for its consumption. In cash crop agriculture, the farmer usually grows one kind of crop, for example cabbages or tomatoes, which he sells for cash. He then uses the money to supply his family's needs. In Thailand, both kinds of agriculture are practiced, and often the same family mixes subsistence with cash crop agriculture. For example, a family who grows mangos as a cash crop will sell most of the fruit, but will also eat some of it. The same family is also likely to have a small vegetable garden and some chickens for their own use; this constitutes subsistence agriculture.

Agriculture in the four regions

Thailand's four regions are characterized by different types of agricultural activities. In the mountainous north, which is not suitable for wet rice fields, fruits are grown as cash crops. However, the villagers also grow small quantities of rice and vegetables for their own use, and raise animals such as chickens and pigs as well.

In the arid northeast, glutinous rice and cassava are the major cash crops, although they are also grown for subsistence. Farmers also grow papayas, limes, and various kinds of vegetables, although mostly for their own consumption rather than for selling. Many of Thailand's dairy farms are located in this region, using large pasture areas which are not suitable for cultivation.

A special type of agriculture practiced in the north, and to a smaller extent in the northeast, is slash-and-burn agriculture. This type of agriculture is carried out by people who dwell in the forests, mostly members of hill tribe minorities. It got its name from the fact that the farmers slash a part of the forest vegetation and burn it, and then use the cleared area for cultivation. Normally, after two years the land is no longer fertile, and then the farmers move to another area, and follow the same procedure. They keep moving from one area to another, often in a circle, finally returning to the place where they had started. By then, the land has usually become fertile and forested again.

If properly practiced, slash-and-burn agriculture causes only slight damage to the forest as a whole, and permits those who practice it to coexist with nature. The parts of the forest used for agriculture are relatively very small, and after the hill tribe community moves on to a new area, reforestation takes place. Indeed, hill tribes have been practicing slash-and-burn agriculture for centuries. However, in recent decades the hill tribe population has grown considerably, forcing their members to destroy larger areas of forestland.

The central region is the most suitable for agriculture, because of its largely flat, fertile land, and its abundant water sources. Most of Thailand's rice, corn, and sugarcane is grown here, as well as many of the tropical fruit for which Thailand is famous: mangos, jackfruit, mandarin oranges, durians, rambutans, mangosteens, and countless others. Vegetables are also grown commercially as well as for subsistence, and poultry raising is common. Along the coast which forms the southern limit of the central plains, fishing is an important occupation.

The south is Thailand's rubber growing region. Almost every farmer in the south has at least some rubber trees. Along the coasts, many coconuts are grown, and fishing is also important. Enjoying the most tropical climate in all of Thailand, the south is also an area where a large variety of tropical fruits are grown.

Feeding the multitudes

Thailand's population has grown at a very rapid rate during the 20th century, from less than 8 million at the turn of the century to about 57 million today. Incredibly, the country's farmers have managed to keep up with this increase, and have been

producing enough food to feed the growing population. In fact, so much food is being produced that much of it can be exported to other countries. Despite its population explosion, Thailand has become one of the world's major food exporters.

How were the Thais able to increase their agricultural production to such huge proportions? Part of the answer lies in the large areas of arable land, which used to be covered with marshes or forest. It was easy to cut down forests or drain the marshes, and turn the land into rice paddies. Between 1950 and 1980, the area of cultivated land doubled, while forest reserve dwindled by half.

By the 1980s, however, the supply of arable land was nearly exhausted. In addition, Thailand was becoming more aware of environmental concerns, and the government no longer allowed the indiscriminate destruction of forests. Yet Thai farmers are still growing more crops. This has been accomplished by increasing productivity: more crops are produced from every acre of land. This in turn is done by using modern technology. Today's Thai farmers, although still relying on water buffaloes to assist them in their work, also use farm machines such as tractors and electric water pumps. They have also been using increasing amounts of fertilizers and insecticides.

Even though in the future Thailand's cultivated land is not likely to grow in size, its agricultural production still has a potential for growth, through more intensive cultivation. Even its most fertile rice fields in the central plains only yield about a third of the crop produced in more developed rice-growing countries such as Taiwan and Japan. If Thai farmers use more modern technology, switch to higher-yielding strains of rice, and take measures to protect their soil's fertility, they can have larger crops without increasing the amount of land cultivated.

In Thailand, there are four major agricultural activities: crop growing, animal husbandry, fishing, and forestry. Each is discussed below.

Crops

Thailand's various regions enjoy different types of climate and soil. This makes it possible to grow many different crops in Thailand. The major crops are rice, cassava, rubber, corn, sugarcane, pineapples, and coconuts.

Thailand's most important agricultural product is rice. Rice is the staple of the Thai people. It is eaten at practically every meal, much like bread used to be in the West until recent times. Before the Ayutthaya period, Thais grew mostly a variety of rice known as glutinous rice. This is still the staple of northern and northeastern Thais. Glutinous rice is suitable for cultivation in the hilly areas, because it is grown in dry fields.

Rice

Central Thais have switched to growing a non-glutinous strain of rice, brought from India. This kind of rice proved well-suited for the type of soil and terrain of the central plains. It is planted in wet fields, which require plenty of water, and the marshes of the Chao Phraya basin proved ideal for this purpose. Since early times, Thais have been producing more rice than they need. The surplus is exported to other countries, and for centuries this was Thailand's main foreign currency earner.

In the 19th century, Thailand's rice exports grew phenomenally, and by the beginning of this century accounted for about 80% of the total exports. Since then, Thailand's agriculture has undergone diversification, and now it is more evenly divided among various different crops. This was accomplished in part through a tax which the government imposed on the export of rice. The tax reduced the profits of rice farmers, and made it more profitable to grow other crops. Nevertheless, Thailand is still the world's chief rice exporter, and fragrant Thai rice is considered by many as the best in the world.

Cassava

Cassava is an edible tuber, like the potato or the yam. When fresh, it can be cooked and served as a vegetable, although Thais prefer it glazed. Several products can be made out of cassava, including starch and tapioca. It is also used as an ingredient in many other food products, as well as in animal feed. These products are increasingly in demand in world markets, and consequently cassava is now competing with rice for topping the list of Thailand's agricultural exports. Already, Thailand is the world's largest exporter of cassava products. Cassava is grown mostly in the central and northeastern regions.

Rubber

Rubber is the most important crop of southern Thailand. It is produced from the sap of the rubber tree. First, cuts are made in the bark of the rubber tree, and then the sap is collected. The raw rubber is transported to factories, where it is processed and used in making many products such as tires, rubber bands, hoses, and containers. Today, Thailand is the world's third largest exporter of rubber, after its neighbors Malaysia and Indonesia.

DID YOU KNOW? With the advent of AIDS, there has been a surge in world demand for rubber, because the only condoms proven an efficient block for the HIV virus are those made of natural rubber (latex).

Sugar

Thais originally made sugar out of the fruit of the toddy palm, and traditional Thai dishes still call for that kind of sugar, which has a special flavor. In fact, the Thai word for "sugar" literally means "toddy palm juice". Today Thailand also produces granulated white sugar, which is made of sugarcane. Sugarcane production greatly increased after World War II, and now it is Thailand's largest crop in terms of weight. In fact, in the mid 1970s so much sugarcane was produced that it surpassed world needs, and farmers were encouraged to turn to other crops instead. It is interesting that such large crops were obtained despite the fact that the productivity per acre in Thailand is low compared to other sugar-producing countries. Sugarcane is also used to produce molasses and alcohol in great quantities. The main sugarcane growing areas in Thailand are in the central region, west and south of Bangkok.

DID YOU KNOW? Molasses is a thick, syrupy substance obtained as a by-product of the process of refining sugar. Molasses is used around the world as a dessert ingredient and also for making animal feed. A jar of molasses at an American supermarket costs several dollars. However, Thailand produces molasses in such quantities that it is used for paving country roads!

Corn

Like sugarcane, corn was not part of the traditional Thai diet. It did not become an important crop in Thailand until after World War II, when its export potential was discovered. By the 1980s Thailand has become a major world exporter of corn. Much of it is destined to become animal feed in Europe and Japan. Thais have also started eating corn themselves, either boiled or grilled.

DID YOU KNOW? In Thailand, corn is considered to be a snack or a dessert ingredient, not a vegetable. Tapioca pudding with corn and corn with coconut and sugar are popular delicacies, but the favorite corn dessert is corn ice cream.

Pineapples

Like corn, pineapples were not native to Thailand, but were introduced from America, probably by the Spanish or the Portuguese. They quickly gained popularity, and are widely eaten today as a snack or a dessert. (Pineapple, papaya, and watermelon make up the standard dessert fruit tray in Thailand.) Pineapples were not exported until 1967, when the first pineapple cannery was opened. Since then the industry has grown so fast that Thailand has become the world's major exporter of canned pineapple.

Other crops

Several plants are grown for their fiber, such as jute, kenaf, and cotton. Jute is used for making sacks and rope; kenaf has similar uses, but is considered to be of inferior quality. Cotton is used chiefly in the textile industry, for making fabrics and clothes. Other crops include coffee, tobacco, tropical fruit, and flowers.

Animal husbandry

Thais raise animals for a variety of purposes. Water buffaloes, and to some extent cattle, are still widely used as beasts of burden to pull plows and oxcarts. Once the animals are too old to work, they are slaughtered for their meat. Cattle are also grown on some farms exclusively for meat or for milk. Milk and dairy products have not been part of the Thai diet in the past, but in recent years Thais have grown more and more accustomed to them, and today a wide range of milk-based beverages, yogurts, and desserts are available.

Most cattle are raised in the northeast, where vast areas are unsuitable for cultivation because of lack of water, poor soil quality, or hilly terrain. Recently, farmers in the south also started raising cattle. They use coconut plantations, where the cattle can graze in the space between the trees. An important side industry of cattle raising is tanning (making leather goods).

In the north, elephants are still raised for work in the logging industry.

The most numerous of the farm animals are chickens. In fact, they outnumber people in Thailand almost by a 2:1 margin. Chickens are raised both for their eggs and their meat, which is the basis of many Thai dishes. The surplus meat is frozen and exported, most of it to Japan. Another popular fowl is the duck, also raised for both eggs and meat. Geese are also raised, though in much smaller numbers.

After chickens, pigs are the most important source of meat. They are grown either on special farms or by individual farmers who raise them for their own use. In the southernmost region, where the population is predominantly Muslim, sheep and goats are raised for meat instead of pigs. This is because Muslims are prohibited by their religion from eating pork.

Fisheries

In olden days, fish was practically the only source of protein in the Thai diet. The old Thai term for food is *khao pla*, which means "rice (and) fish". Thais harvest fish both from inland water sources such as rivers, streams, ponds, and canals, as well as from

the Gulf of Thailand, the Andaman Sea, and beyond. In the past refrigeration and canning were not available, so in order to keep fish for lengthy periods of time or make it suitable for transportation, it was either dried or salted. Fish, including dried and salted fish, is an important part of Thai meals, still accounting for most of the protein in the Thai diet.

DID YOU KNOW? Thai rice farmers have found an ingenious way of supplementing their diets, as well as earning some extra money. Every planting season, when the wet rice fields are flooded, small fish are released into the water. When the fish grow, they are harvested together with the rice!

The Gulf of Thailand is the home of a huge fishing fleet, with smaller numbers along the coast of the Andaman Sea. About 20,000 fishing vessels do most of their fishing near the coast, mostly within the Gulf, while an equal number is equipped for engaging in deep water fishing in the open sea.

Until the 1960s, Thailand could not supply its own demand for fish, and needed to import large quantities. The situation has now changed, with Thailand becoming one of the world's largest seafood exporters. Most of the exported seafood is in the form of canned fish and frozen shrimp.

Several serious problems are now facing the fishing industry. Perhaps the most serious problem is the cornering of the market by large companies, who use fleets of large, well-equipped fishing trawlers. They are motivated by a desire for quick profits, and engage in over-fishing, which has reduced productivity. There simply aren't enough fish left. A tragic side effect of this is that small-scale fishermen who depend on fishing for their livelihood cannot compete with the large trawlers, which sweep the water clean of fish. Most of these fishermen own no land and have no other profession, and are now finding it very hard to survive. Inland fishing also faces a serious problem: pollution has reduced the number of fish in freshwater lakes and rivers, and in some areas has completely wiped out the fish population.

Luckily, some measures can be taken to remedy this situation. In regard to over-fishing, the government could enact and enforce strict fishing controls, thereby ensuring that fishermen can still support themselves and their families. Government control could also reduce water pollution, especially from industrial sources, and thus revive inland fishing. Another way of countering low fish production is through aquaculture (raising fish and shellfish commercially). This has already been done successfully both in inland fishponds and coastal shellfish farms, and has a large growth potential.

Forestry

Forests are one of Thailand's major natural resources. For centuries, Thais have been using wood from their abundant forests for building houses and making many useful products. In the 19th century, Thailand started exporting large quantities of its most prized wood, teak. The logging industry was mostly in the hands of foreign companies, but was regulated by the Thai government. The government granted logging concessions, or permits to log in a certain area, in return for a fee.

In 1961, the Thai government conducted an aerial photographic survey of the country. It showed that despite intensive logging which had been taking place for about a century, most of the country (about 56%) was still covered by forests. Since then, more restrictions were gradually put on logging, leading to a total ban. However, these restrictions were never enforced, partly because the government lacked the means to enforce them, and partly because corrupt officials have been ignoring illegal logging activities in return for a share of the profits. In 1988, another survey was taken, this time with the aid of satellite photographs. The results were shocking: the area covered by forests had shrunk by exactly half, to 28%.

Today, forest areas are continuing to dwindle, despite the logging ban. This is caused not only because by illegal logging, which is still rampant, but also because of uncontrolled slash-and-burn agriculture, and because landless farmers are encroaching on forest reserves. The situation was exacerbated in the early 1990s by an army program which forcibly evicted farmers from forest reserves, only to resettle them in other forest areas. After the weakening of the military following the Bloody May events in 1992, this program was suspended.

Despite the fact that the forestry sector is in a continuous decline, teak is still an important raw material, mostly for the furniture industry. Much of it is now imported from Burma. Other types of wood are still harvested in Thailand, because of the great demand, especially for construction. However, the supply has been falling short of the demand. To remedy the situation, the government has embarked on a reforestation program, trying to replace the depleted forests. However, because of the growing need for farmland, as well as because of the long period needed for the trees to mature, this program has been only partially successful.

DID YOU KNOW? A teak tree takes about 100 years to reach full maturity.

Industry

Industry is quickly replacing agriculture as Thailand's most important economic sector. Economists predict that Thailand will soon become an NIC (Newly Industrialized Country) and join the ranks of such prospering Asian nations as Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan.

An industrial country is one which has a highly developed industry. The U.S.A., Japan, and most European countries are industrialized. On the other hand, most African and Asian nations (like Thailand) are developing countries whose economy is based mostly on agriculture. The most important industrial sectors in Thailand are manufacturing, construction, tourism, and mining.

Manufacturing

In 1960 agriculture provided 40% of the GDP (gross domestic product) of Thailand, while manufacturing contributed only 13%. By 1990 agriculture's share has shrunk to only 12%, while manufacturing had doubled to 26%. In terms of exports, the growth of the manufacturing sector is even more dramatic: in 1960, manufactured goods accounted for only 3% of Thailand's exports, but accounted for almost 70% by 1990. Most manufactured goods are made out of primary agricultural products such as cotton, wood, rubber, and various foodstuffs. The most important manufacturing sector is textiles and garments, followed by food products, machinery, and chemicals.

Textiles

Textiles are Thailand's second most important foreign currency earner, after tourism. Thailand is one of the world's major producers of cotton, silk, and artificial fabrics. In the production process, the raw material is first spun into thread, and then dyed and woven into fabric. The fabric is then either sold as such, or sewn into garments and other products. Fabrics are produced both as a cottage industry (by people in their homes) and in factories. The most prized fabric produced in Thailand is silk.

Silk

Cambodian writings suggest that ancient Thailand was a silk production center that served the entire region. Later, a large silk industry developed around Bangkok. During the 19th century, this industry almost died out, because it became cheaper to import silk from China and Japan. King Rama V was displeased with the disappearance of the Thai silk industry, and invited silk experts from Japan to help revive it, with little success.

Around 1950, the American adventurer and art lover Jim Thompson became interested in the dying art, and decided to try to revive it. He found out that although in the central region silk production had all but disappeared, in the northeast it was still very much alive as a cottage industry. That is, people (usually women) made silk in their own homes. The silk they made was mostly for their own use, and very little was sold in other regions.

Thompson established a silk company, and made efforts to repopularize Thai silk in Bangkok as well as introduce it to foreign markets. He received a big boost from an unexpected source: Queen Sirikit became a fan of Thai silk, and soon after becoming queen in 1950 she decided to have all her formal dresses made of silk. Many ladies of Bangkok's high society soon took after the queen, and started wearing Thai silk garments, and the fashion spread to other parts of the country.

Today, the Jim Thompson silk company is still active, despite the mysterious disappearance of its founder in the jungles of Malaysia. In addition, Thailand has dozens of other silk companies in Thailand which are larger than the Jim Thompson Co., as well as hundreds of smaller ones. The silk production center is still in the northeast, although some silk is produced in other regions.

Food products

Thailand is the only country in Asia which exports more food than it imports. In fact, it is the fifth largest food exporter in the world. Much of Thailand's food products are still primary products, and much of that undergoes what is termed *simple agricultural processing*: the product is prepared for marketing, but still cannot be considered a manufactured product. For example, rice is milled before it is marketed, and shrimps bound for export are washed and frozen. However, increasing amounts of produce now undergo more complex processing in factories. Cassava products top the list, with other major products being canned seafood (mostly tuna, clams, and crabmeat), sugar, and canned fruits and vegetables. Thailand is the world's leading exporter of canned pineapple, but also produces a wide range of other canned produce, such as rambutans, mushrooms, asparagus, and bamboo shoots.

Jewelry

Not yet a major component of the GDP, the jewelry industry is nonetheless Thailand's third most important export, after textiles and rice. In fact, Thailand is the world's second largest jewelry exporter, after Italy. The Thai jewelry industry goes back to ancient times, but only recently has it become commercially significant, due to growing exports. Thailand produces large amounts of gemstones, most of which are now cut and polished in the country.

Leading the market are rubies and sapphires, mined in the eastern and western parts of the central region. They are either sold as loose jewels, or set into rings, bracelets, necklaces, and other pieces of jewelry. Thailand has been importing growing quantities of precious and semiprecious metals such as gold and silver for use in its rapidly growing jewelry industry. Thailand also imports jewels which are not mined in Thailand, such as emeralds and diamonds.

Other manufactured goods

Various chemicals are produced from the many minerals mined in Thailand, with the most important being petrochemical products (made from oil and natural gas). Natural gas, in which the Gulf of Thailand is rich, serves not only as fuel; it is separated into gases which are used in welding and cutting of metals, coloring citrus fruit, and in surgical procedures (as an anesthetic). Plastic is also produced from natural gas in a chemical process called polymerization, and forms the basis of a rapidly growing plastic industry. Other goods manufactured in Thailand include electric and electronic products, cigarettes, sheet metal, and rubber products.

Tourism

The Thai travel industry has grown tremendously in recent years, and is now the country's largest foreign currency earner. Over five million tourists visit Thailand each year, and spend an average of seven days in the country. Most visitors come to Thailand from other Asian countries: Malaysia, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, in that order. Next is the U.S.A., followed by Australia, Germany, Britain, and France.

Many factors have contributed to the success of the tourist industry. First and foremost among them is Thailand's large variety of tourist attractions. For those who like a relaxed seaside vacation, there are hundreds of miles of pristine white sand beaches, and year-round warm weather. For the adventurous, there is jungle trekking, elephant riding, and river trips. Those interested in art and history will be able to see countless temples, palaces, and archeological sites. And nature lovers can lose themselves in lush rainforests teeming with exotic wildlife and magnificent plants and flowers, or go snorkeling in the Gulf of Thailand with its coral reefs and tropical fish.

A second reason for the success of Thailand's tourist industry is its good value. Because Thailand is a developing country, labor cost is very low, which makes tourist-related expenses such as hotel stays and restaurant meals cheap as well. Tourists from industrialized countries can enjoy luxury hotels and restaurants which they

could not afford in their own country, and young tourists discover that spending a vacation in Thailand is cheaper than living at home.

Thirdly, Thailand is a peaceful country which hasn't been at war for many years. The surrounding countries, which could be potential competitors, have been involved in armed conflicts in recent decades, and some still are. Naturally, foreign tourists prefer to spend their vacations in peaceful surroundings.

Finally, the quality of tourist services is very high, attracting tourists to come back to Thailand. Thai International Airways consistently ranks as one of the best airlines in the world in international opinion polls, and Thai hotels are frequently awarded first prize in international competitions.

But together with its high profits, tourism has also brought about problems, either directly or indirectly. Many resorts all over the country have been illegally developed on forest reserve land, in cooperation with corrupt officials. In other areas, local inhabitants who could not prove they owned their land were chased away by hotel and resort developers, again aided by corrupt officials. Yet another tactic is threatening the lives of landowners in order to force them to sell their land to developers.

Mass tourism has also brought on environmental problems. For example Phi Phi Island, only a few years ago voted the world's most beautiful island by international travel agents, is now one of the world's most polluted islands. The Similan Islands National Park is also being invaded by thousands of tourists who have damaged its unique wildlife. In the north, the traditional lifestyle and culture of hill tribes is being disturbed by thousand of foreign tourists on trekking trips. Many villagers have completely forsaken their traditional occupations, and now make their living by begging from visitors. Others have sold their family heirlooms such as old embroidery and silver jewelry to tourists, and have lost an important part of their heritage.

Mining

Mining is an important industry in Thailand, and tin the chief mineral is mined primarily in the south. Most of the ore is brought to a large smelting plant on Phuket island. There it is melted down, and the tin is separated from the other minerals contained in the ore. Pure tin is soft, so it is often combined with other metals to form harder alloys such as pewter and bronze. It is also used for coating other metals in order to prevent corrosion, for example in making food cans.

DID YOU KNOW? Thais must have been mining tin for a long time, since tin was one of the components of the bronze used for casting the walking Buddha images of the Sukhothai period (13th-16th centuries).

Tin mining, although bringing the country large amounts of foreign currency and providing employment for thousands of people, has also had some negative side effects. In the 1980s, Thailand experienced a tin rush, with effects similar to those of the California gold rush. Illegal mining became a major problem, with small boats extracting the profitable ore from the seabed right under the government's nose. Other illegal and criminal activities also flourished alongside the illegal mining, such as smuggling tin out of the country. Some companies after quick profits mined only the richest parts of each tin deposit they found, leaving behind the lower quality ore. Had all the ore been mined together, it would have been profitable to smelt it, but it was not worth it to mine and smelt just the inferior ore left behind. This caused a great waste of one of the country's most important natural resources.

Gemstones

Many gemstones are found in Thailand, the most important of which are red rubies and blue sapphires. There are also deposits of jade, garnets, beryl, quartz, and zircon. Gems have been an important Thai export for a long time. In the past most of the gems were exported as found, to be cut and set abroad, but the situation has changed. In the 1980s, a large jewelry industry developed in Thailand, and today cut and polished gems as well as finished jewelry are an important export item. This is another step in the general direction of exporting fewer primary products and more manufactured goods.

Other minerals

Fluorite, used for making such products as fluorescent light bulbs, is another important export. There are also smaller quantities of iron, lead, barite, gypsum, manganese, wolfram, lignite, zinc, and antimony.

DID YOU KNOW? Thailand's northeast has large deposits of high-grade rock salt, estimated at about 2 billion tons. If all that salt were mined, it would provide every man, woman, and child in the world with more than 800 pounds of salt.

Energy

As Thailand becomes more and more industrialized, and as its towns and villages become more developed, the demand for energy increases. Until after World War II wood and refuse were sufficient to provide most of the country's energy needs. Since then, many additional energy sources have been put to use.

Beginning in 1964, several hydroelectric plants were built in various parts of the country, using water energy to generate electricity. Other electric plants have switched from wood and rice husks to oil as their energy source, while additional oil-fired plants have been built. There are also electric plants using lignite, a locally mined mineral, and natural gas, of which abundant deposits have been discovered in the Gulf of Thailand. These have reduced Thailand's dependence on foreign oil, and have facilitated its industrial development. Despite the rapid increase in power output, there are still some remote villages in Thailand which don't have electricity. By the year 2000, however, the government plans to have all villages connected to the electricity system.

Oil is Thailand's main source of energy. Since the country has only small oil deposits, most of it has to be imported. This is not a favorable situation, because it forces Thailand to spend large amounts of foreign currency buying oil from other countries. When oil prices rise, even greater sums have to be spent, and prices of Thai products have to be raised too. When the products become expensive, fewer people abroad are willing to buy them, and this reduces the country's exports and foreign currency earnings even further. For these reasons, Thailand has been trying to reduce its dependence on foreign oil.

How can this be achieved? The most promising prospect seems to be using more natural gas than oil. Natural gas is produced in large (and growing) quantities in the Gulf of Thailand, and the government is converting more and more electric plants to run on gas. In 1986 natural gas provided only .5% of the country's energy needs, but by 1991 the figure had risen to 15.6%, and is expected to reach 18.3% by 1996. Hydroelectric power also has some growth potential, although it has become less popular due to environmental concerns. Building dams to harness the rivers' energy often floods natural habitats (areas where wild plants grow and wild animals live) and threatens Thailand's beleaguered fauna and flora even further. In the north there are large deposits of oil shale, a kind of rock from which oil can be produced. However, the process of extracting oil from shale is costly, and Thailand's oil shale contains small amounts of oil, so it will not be worthwhile to exploit this resource unless world oil prices rise significantly. Finally, Thailand has some experimental solar and wind energy projects, which have promising futures.

Transportation

Land, water, and air transportation are all utilized in Thailand. Motor vehicles and trains are the major means of land transportation, although in some parts of the country elephants and other beasts of burden still play an important role. Boats and barges travel along Thailand's many creeks and rivers, as well as in the Gulf of Thailand, and to a lesser extent in the Andaman Sea. Air links are maintained among a growing number of towns within Thailand and with many foreign destinations.

Land transport

The first roads in Thailand were built in the northeast, while this region was still a part of the Khmer empire. The northeast has few waterways, and the Khmers rulers needed a way of transporting people and goods into and within this area. In the rest of the country, elephant trails and footpaths were the only means of land transport until the 19th century. This is also when Bangkok got its first street.

DID YOU KNOW? When it was newly built, Bangkok's first street was called by the local foreign community New Road. Foreigners still refer to by that name, even though by now thousands of other roads and streets have been built. There is probably no other city in the world whose oldest road is called New Road.

Thailand only began developing an extensive road system in the middle of this century. Today it has become the most important channel of transportation. However, except for a few good roads in the central region, most roads are still rather narrow and uneven. Many villages are still not connected to the road system, and are accessible only by boat or by trekking through forests.

Railways

Thailand has an extensive and efficient railroad system, connecting all parts of the country. The first rail service, connecting Bangkok with the former capital of Ayutthaya, was opened in 1896. Today the State Railways of Thailand operate five principal lines, all starting at Bangkok. The northern line goes up to Chiang Mai, the capital of the north. The northeastern line reaches Korat and Ubon, the region's most important cities, as well as the city of Nong Khai near the Laotian border. The eastern line used to connect Thailand with Cambodia, but now goes only up to the Cambodian border. It is expected to be reopened in the near future. The western line goes to Nakhon Pathom and Kanchanaburi; Thailand and Burma are now considering extending it over the river Kwai so that the two countries would be joined

by rail. Finally, the southern line reaches Sungai Golok and Padang Besar on the Malaysian border, and connects with trains which go all the way down to Singapore.

Trains are used for transporting both passengers and cargo. However, the railways' share in the transportation system has been declining due to competition from newly built and improved roads. Passengers are switching in droves to intercity buses, which are much faster, and much more freight is now transported by trucks than by train. However, the railway remains an important means of transportation. And while intercity lines have declined in popularity, suburban trains in metropolitan Bangkok have become more popular, because they can beat the traffic, especially during rush hours.

Water transport

Until recent times, water was the main channel of transportation in Thailand, with the Chao Phraya River as the main artery. Other rivers, like the Mekong, have also been important. Thais utilize almost every stream, creek, and canal in the country for travel. It should be pointed out, however, that inland waterways are navigable almost exclusively in the central plains; mountain rivers and streams are either too small or too rapid to allow boat travel. Even in the central plains, about three quarters of the waterways are suitable for navigation only during the rainy season, because during the rest of the year they do not have enough water.

In the past two centuries, when new areas were opened for settlement, it has been the government's policy to dig canals, which have facilitated both irrigation and transportation. In Bangkok, the country's capital, there were initially no streets--just canals. Many canals have since been filled in and replaced with roads, but waterways are still an important channel of transportation, not only within Bangkok but also between Bangkok and the surrounding provinces. Thailand's contacts with the outside world were also maintained in the past primarily by water.

Although most passengers now prefer travelling to and from Thailand by air, Bangkok's riverine port, which connects to the Gulf of Thailand, is still where almost all cargo enters or leaves the country. In addition to the Bangkok port, there are several other much smaller ports along the Gulf of Thailand, and a new deep-water port is being built southeast of Bangkok in the province of Chonburi.

Air transport

Aviation came to Thailand early, when the Royal Thai Air Force was founded during World War I. Thai civil aviation, however, developed much later. The domestic carrier Thai Airways Company started operating in 1951, and in 1959 the

international airline Thai Airways International (THAI) was established. The two have since merged and now form one company. THAI has won excellent international ratings for quality and service. The company currently serves more than twenty domestic airports and another forty-five cities worldwide.

In 1992, THAI underwent a crisis when the extent of the its executive officers' corruption became known. The air force officers who had been running the company for their own benefit were then removed, and the company is now expected to become highly profitable.

Don Muang Airport, Bangkok's airport, is the largest airport in Southeast Asia, and is served by most of the world's major airlines. It is sometimes called the Gateway to Southeast Asia, because most flights to the region land here first before continuing to their final destination. There are another three international airports in Thailand, in the northern city of Chiang Mai as well as in Phuket and Hat Yai in the south.

The Thai currency

The Thai currency unit is the **baht**, which is divided into 100 satang. There are 25 bahts to the dollar, which make the baht worth about 4 cents. Coins in circulation are in the denomination of 25 and 50 satang, and 1, 5, and 10 baht. Banknotes are in the following denominations: 10, 20, 50, 100, 500, and 1,000 baht.

DID YOU KNOW? In addition to the coins and banknotes mentioned above, Thailand has a banknote in an unusual denomination: 60 baht. It was issued in 1987, to commemorate King Rama IX's 60th birthday. However, few of these banknotes are in circulation, because most are kept as souvenirs.

The current decimal currency system has replaced a much more complicated one. Under the old system, one baht was equal to 128 sòlot, 64 att, 32 siao, 16 sik, 8 fuang, and 4 saleung. There were also units larger than the baht: for example, 80 baht equalled one chang. Although the decimal system has been in effect since 1909, Thai schoolchildren still have to memorize the old system.

From the Sukhothai period and the middle of the 19th century, there were two widely used forms of currency. One was cowrie shells, which were already mentioned in the Ram Khamhaeng inscription, and were formerly used as currency in other parts of the world as well. The other form of currency was coins made of oval pieces of silver stamped with a royal stamp, whose ends were pressed together. They were nicknamed "bullet money" because of their shape.

The first paper money was issued during the reign of King Rama IV (1851-1868), and bore an inscription in eleven different languages: Thai, English, Pali, Sanskrit, Malay, Cambodian, Laotian, Gujarati, Burmese, Chinese, and Latin. The first coins bearing the likeness of the king were issued during the reign of Rama V (1868-1910).

DID YOU KNOW? Thailand changes its coinage frequently, in part because of inflation, which used to be quite high. The size of the 1-baht coin was reduced several times in recent decades as it decreased in value. As a result, there are now five different 1-baht coins in circulation, all in different sizes, and none of them bearing any foreign language inscription. This can be very frustrating for visitors, especially since some of the older 1-baht coins are about the same color and size as the newer 5-baht coins.

Summary

Thailand has enjoyed a prosperous, free market economy. Agriculture forms the backbone of the economy, although there is a shift from primary products to manufactured goods. The country is being rapidly industrialized, and is expected to become an NIC in the near future. Both subsistence and cash crop agriculture are practiced, and each region has its own particular crops. The major crops are rice, cassava, rubber, corn, sugarcane, pineapples, and coconuts. Other major agricultural products are chicken, eggs, pork, seafood, and wood, though wood production has been rapidly declining.

Manufacturing is now the largest sector of the economy. The major manufactured goods are textiles, food products, and jewelry. Tourism is also an important industry, and the country's largest source of foreign currency. Tin mining is an important economic activity in the south, and the Gulf of Thailand supplies large quantities of natural gas. The Thai currency is the baht, worth about four US cents.

UNIT 11 Student Activities

Debate Topic

Thailand has many landless farmers, people whose main occupation is agriculture although they do not own land. Should the government allow them to cut down forest reserves in order to obtain land for farming?

Assignments

A. Library tasks

1. Which country is the world's largest producer of rice? Why, then, is Thailand the world's largest rice exporter, and not this country?

2. Compare the old British currency system, used until 1970, and the old Thai system, current until 1909.

B. Review questions

1. What is the difference between primary and manufactured products? Which kind does Thailand produce?

2. Why has Thailand's agriculture been so successful?

3. How are Thailand's four regions different from each other in terms of agriculture?

4. What is slash-and-burn agriculture, and what problems can it cause?

5. What is the relationship between Thailand's population explosion and agriculture?

6. With Thailand's arable land reserves all used up, how will it be able to feed its growing population?

7. What are Thailand's most important crops, and in which parts of the country are they grown?

8. Which animals do Thai farmers raise, and for what purposes?

9. What problems is Thailand's fishing industry facing? How can these problems be solved?

10. Why has Thai wood production significantly decreased in recent years?

11. What are Thailand's most important manufactured products, and from which raw materials are they made?

12. Who was Jim Thompson, and what was his contribution to the Thai silk industry?

13. The growing jewelry industry has contributed not only to Thailand's exports, but also to the imports. Why?

14. What attracts millions of foreigners to spend their vacations in Thailand?

15. What problems has the tourist industry caused?

16. Where and how is tin produced in Thailand?

17. What is Thailand's main source of energy? How is it obtained, and what are its disadvantages?

18. How can Thailand reduce its dependence on foreign oil?

19. Before this century, what were Thailand's main means of transportation?

20. What forms of land transport are used in Thailand? What is the most common form?

21. Describe the development of civil aviation in Thailand.

22. What is the Thai currency unit called, and how much is it worth?

23. When did Thailand start minting coins and banknotes with the king's image?

C. Creative thought

Various economic, environmental, cultural, and other problems have been described in this chapter. List five problems which seem important to you, and then give a possible solution to each one. The solutions do not have to come from the chapter; you can make up your own solutions.

D. Just for fun

If you answer correctly all the definitions, their first letters will make up a term used in this chapter.

A fabric made in Thailand	_ _ _ _
A fruit grown by farmers in the northeast	_ _ _ _
Formerly, Thailand's largest economic sector	_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _
Thailand's largest crop in terms of weight	_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _
Minority groups who dwell in the mountains	_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _
Destination of Thailand's first railway line	_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _
Fuel produced in the Gulf of Thailand	_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _
Kind of rice field used in the mountains	_ _ _
The Thai currency unit	_ _ _ _
Destination on the northeastern line	_ _ _ _
The south's important agricultural product	_ _ _ _ _ _
Thailand is predicted to become one soon (abbr.)	_ _ _

Unit 12: The Government

Traditional forms of government

Traditional Thai society was organized in family-based structures. The nuclear family, headed by the parents, belonged to a larger extended family or clan, usually headed by the oldest member of the group. Several clans formed a village. The villages were clustered around towns which resembled the city-states of ancient Europe. These towns were called *muang*s, a term which is also used to refer to the entire area under the town's control, including the surrounding villages. The chieftain of a *muang* was called *chao*. The inhabitants of the town, as well as peasants from the surrounding countryside, had to pay a tribute to the *chao* in the form of labor or agricultural products. In return, the *chao* was expected to provide them with protection from attacks by foreign raiders.

Later, several *muang*s may have joined together in a network of trade and military alliance, or stronger *muang*s may have overpowered weaker ones to form a large area united under the leadership of a single *chao*. Thus the first Thai states were born.

The early Thai states

Early Thai kings were absolute rulers, but were usually looked upon by the population as fathers rather than tyrants. The relationship between the people and their king was much like relationships within a family. The king was sometimes loved, sometimes feared, but always respected. He was expected to take care of his "children" the people, solve their problems, and protect them. The greatest king of the early Thai period, Ram Khamhaeng, was referred to by his subjects by the title Pho Khun, meaning Father Lord.

Control of the state during this early period was still firmly in the hands of the king and his family. However, noble families who assisted the royal family in the administration of the kingdom began to gain power and influence as well.

The god-king cult

During the early Ayutthaya period, Thais were strongly influenced by the Khmers' culture and government system. Until quite recently, the Thais had been simple peasants whose lives were centered around their villages, so they naturally looked up to the highly developed Khmer culture and emulated some of its aspects. For example, since the Thais needed a system to administrate their states, they imitated

the Khmer system. They also borrowed from the Khmer language many terms which have to do with public administration.

One aspect of Khmer culture which influenced the Thais was the *devaraja* (god-king) cult. It is not certain if the Khmer people actually believed their kings were gods, but the kings themselves certainly acted as if they believed so. They treated their people as slaves, and forced them to build countless temples and palaces for them. Under Khmer influence, Thai kings slowly changed their image from that of a strict but caring father to that of a distant and arbitrary ruler.

King Trailok's government

The first to establish a highly organized and centralized government was King Trailok (1448-1488). He issued two important laws regarding civil administration: the Law of the Civil Hierarchy and the Law of the Military and Provincial Hierarchy. (Hierarchy here means organizing people according to rank or position.) The laws effectively divided the government branches into two, the civilian branch and the military branch.

During this period, the entire bureaucracy (government officials) as well as the general population was organized into a hierarchy, and each person received a number rank according to his or her position. This system was called *sakdi na*, which means "rice field power". The number ranks are supposed to have represented the number of *rai* (a land measure equal to 2/5 of an acre) which that person was theoretically entitled to own.

DID YOU KNOW? Under the *sakdi na* system, even slaves were given a title. Their rank was 5, meaning they were theoretically entitled to own 5 *rai* (about 2 acres) of land. Even monks, who are forbidden to own any property, and housewives were given a *sakdi na* rank. The king's rank was "infinite". These facts clearly show that the land ownership to which the rank referred was purely symbolic.

The reforms of Rama V

King Trailok's government system proved to be efficient, and very suitable for the purposes of the Thai state. In fact, it survived with few changes for a total of about 400 years! By the late 19th century, Thailand was facing a grave danger in the form of European colonialism, and King Rama V came to the conclusion that some drastic changes and reforms were needed if Thailand's sovereignty was to be maintained.

In 1888, King Rama V announced his administrative reform plan. The government at that time consisted of seven ministries: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Treasury, the Ministry of Lands, the Ministry of the Capital, the Ministry of the Southern Provinces, and the Ministry of the Northern Provinces. Instead, twelve new ministries were created, along the lines of European governments. These were the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, War, Public Works, Public Instruction, Justice, Army, Agriculture, Finance, Palace, Local Administration, Interior, and "Privy Seal", forerunner of the modern Office of the Prime Minister. Although some ministries have since been added or combined with other ministries, in general this system has survived until today.

The present-day government

Following the 1932 Revolution, Thailand became a constitutional monarchy. The king lost all his executive powers, although his ceremonial status as head of state was still guaranteed by the constitution. The head of government, a position formerly also held by king, was now filled by the person holding the new post of prime minister. As far as the ministries and their functions and responsibilities are concerned, though, there were few changes.

Since 1932, the constitution has been periodically abolished and replaced by other constitutions. The present constitution dates from 1991, and is the sixteenth in less than sixty years. However, while the details and fine points have changed from one constitution to another, the main elements have remained unchanged. The position of the monarch as head of state is guaranteed, and there is a stipulation for a legislature at least partially elected by the people and an executive branch consisting of a cabinet headed by a prime minister.

The Thai government is divided into three branches: the legislative branch, the executive branch, and the judicial branch. In addition, the military has to be considered as a branch in its own right, because until at least 1992 it was not subordinate to the executive branch, but rather enjoyed an equal if not superior status. A fifth component is the monarchy. Although under the constitution it has no political power, the monarchy still enjoys a very prestigious and influential status in Thailand.

The legislative branch

Under the present constitution, the Thai parliament consists of a House of Representatives and a Senate. The principal role of the parliament is legislative: creating and amending laws to suit the country's current needs.

There are 360 members in the House of Representatives, elected by the populace in regional and personal elections. The term *regional* here means that the country is divided into regions with roughly the same number of people, and each region elects its own representative. The elections are also *personal*, because although candidates belong to various political parties, people vote for individual persons, not for parties.

The Senate consists of 270 members, who are officially appointed by the king. In reality, all members of the 1992 Senate were chosen by the heads of the military junta that had assumed control of the government a year earlier.

This method of appointing senators instead of having them elected by the people led many critics to brand the present constitution as "undemocratic". The 1992 constitution also had some other undemocratic clauses, but most have been removed by now.

The executive branch

The executive branch of the government is in charge of running the country and carrying out the government's policies. In Thailand the executive branch is headed by a prime minister, and consists of thirteen ministries and offices.

The Ministry of Defense is in charge of the armed forces. Prior to 1992 the roles were reversed, with military officers controlling the ministry which is supposed to control them. The situation is now being corrected, although it will take a long time before the powerful military officers are stripped of their illegal power. The Ministry of Defense is also in charge of providing support and assistance to war veterans.

The Ministry of Finance is in charge of collecting taxes and customs, economic planning, and administering the country's budget.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for carrying out the foreign policy of the country. It runs diplomatic missions abroad, such as embassies and consulates. It also takes care of official guests from foreign countries, and maintains contacts with international organizations.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives is in charge of irrigation projects, livestock development, fisheries, forestry, and land development.

The Ministry of Transport and Communication is in charge of airports, harbors, and highways, as well as the postal and telegraph systems.

The Ministry of Commerce oversees foreign as well as internal trade.

The Interior Ministry has many responsibilities: local administration, the police force, public welfare, public works, the prison system, town planning, and land administration.

The Ministry of Justice is in charge of the legal system, and is responsible for administering the courts and carrying out their decisions.

The Ministry of Science, Technology, and Energy's duties are self-explanatory; it is also in charge of environmental protection.

The Ministry of Public Health administers the country's public hospital system, and from time to time also conducts special campaigns to combat large scale health problems such as the AIDS epidemic.

The Ministry of Industry oversees the country's mineral resources and promotes industrial development.

The Ministry of Education is in charge of teacher training, fine arts, vocational education, religious affairs, and cultural activities, as well as all public schools. Public universities, however, are under the independent Office of University Affairs. Another office, the Prime Minister's Office, is in charge of all government bodies which do not fall under any of the other ministries, such as the royal household administration, the bureau of the crown property, the state auditor's office, and the Bank of Thailand.

At the head of each ministry, there is a minister and one or more deputy ministers. They are usually political figures, appointed by the prime minister, and it is they who determine the policies of the respective ministries of which they are in charge. In addition, every ministry has a person who actually runs its everyday affairs and carries out the policy set by the ministers. These persons are called "permanent secretaries" and their position is like that of a general director. Several ministers are appointed to the cabinet without being assigned any specific duties, for political considerations. They receive the title "Minister of the Prime Minister's Office", and participate in the cabinet's decision making process. The head of the cabinet, or "council of ministers" as it is called in Thailand, is the prime minister.

The judicial branch

According to the King Ram Khamhaeng inscription, in front of the king's palace there was a large bell. Anyone who had any grievance could ring it, whereupon the king would come out and make a decision on the matter. While this description is probably at least partially exaggerated, it does convey the ancient role of the Thai king as purveyor of justice.

Following the revolution of 1932, three levels of courts were established: courts of the first instance, courts of appeal, and the supreme court. The judicial branch is in charge of carrying out justice.

The courts of the first instance have since been expanded to include labor, juvenile, and tax courts, in addition to civil and criminal courts, as well district courts dealing with minor cases. Together, the different kinds of courts of the first instance deal with most lawsuits.

In each of the country's four regions, there is also a court of appeal. If either side thinks it has been done an injustice at a court of the first instance, it may appeal to the nearest court of appeal, which is authorized to overturn any decision of a lower court.

The highest instance is the supreme court, located in Bangkok. Parties still unhappy with the results of their appeals, may appeal to the supreme court. After appealing to the supreme court, there is still one more recourse: to petition to the king.

In addition to civilian courts, there is also a system of military courts, for cases involving military personal or offenses of a military nature.

The military

The Thai armed forces consist of an army, a navy (which includes a marine corps), and an air force. The army is divided into military regions, which correspond to Thailand's four geographical regions. The navy is rather small, having been cut down to a quarter of its former size after it attempted to seize control of the country in 1951. The air force is one of the oldest air forces in the world; a flying squadron was even sent to France towards the end of World War I.

Every Thai male between the ages of 21 and 25 has to serve a compulsory two-year military service. However, students can have their service deferred, or join a special military training program for students similar to ROTC in the United States, which exempts them from service. Women are not required to serve in the armed forces, but may volunteer if they wish.

Since 1932, the Thai armed forces have played a role in running the country. For long periods, Thailand was virtually a military dictatorship, with military officers in complete control of the government.

In 1951, Thailand became the second country (after the United States) to send troops to the United Nations force in the Korean War. Thailand also fought in the Vietnam

War alongside the United States. Since the 1970s, most of Thailand's military actions have been directed against insurgents, and there have also been a few small border skirmishes with Laos.

The armed forces are assisted by two paramilitary organizations. The first is the border patrol, which is a branch of the police department, and is charged with protecting the country's borders against possible incursions. The second is the jungle patrol, formerly a militia consisting of civilian volunteers, but now a full-time organization. Its main purpose is to seek out and destroy communists and other dissidents who have traditionally sought refuge in the jungle.

Local Administration

Thailand is divided into seventy-five provinces. Each province is headed by a governor who is appointed by the government, except for Bangkok Province which has an elected governor. Each of the provinces is divided into districts, or *amphoes*, headed by another appointed official called *nai amphoe* or "district master". Ordinary citizens have little contact with these high officials. In their everyday problems, they contact the village headman, or *phu-yai-bahn*. The *phu-yai-bahn* is elected by the villagers, and is supposed to represent them before higher authorities, as well as serve as arbitrator in conflicts which sometimes arise in the village. A group of villages forms a subdistrict (*tambon*), and the village headmen (who, incidentally, can be women) periodically elect one of themselves to serve as a subdistrict head (*kamnan*).

Administrative unit	English term	Headed by	English term
changwat	province	*phu wa*	governor
amphoe	district	*nai amphoe*	district head
tambon	subdistrict	*kamnan*	subdistrict head
mubahn	village	*phu-yai-bahn*	village headman

Education

Traditional education

Since ancient times and until well into the 20th century, the main providers of education in Thailand have been monks. Parents who wanted their sons to receive some education sent them to the community's monastery. There, the boys served as the monks' assistants, and in return the monks taught them reading, writing,

religion, and sometimes a trade as well. This system worked remarkably well; so well, in fact, that until this century the literacy rate in Thailand was higher than in most Western countries. Early European travelers marvelled at this system of free education and at the fact that even simple farmers could often read and write.

Although quite effective and suitable for a traditional society, the system of monastic education had its shortcomings. First of all, because Thai monks are not allowed to associate with the opposite sex, girls were excluded from receiving education. Secondly, sciences and European languages, necessary subjects in the modern world, were not taught at the monasteries.

Modernization of the education system

Again, it was King Rama V who realized the need for modernization and improvement of the Thai education system, so that the country might be in a better position to defend itself from the advances of Western colonialism. He founded the Ministry of Public Instruction (later renamed the Ministry of Education), and established schools. However, these schools were mostly located in Bangkok, and designed to serve the needs of the ruling elite. The common people still turned to monasteries for their education.

Over time, two education systems evolved in Thailand. The first one was the Bangkok school system, which was modeled after European schools. It received the bulk of the Ministry of Public Instruction budget. The second system consisted of provincial schools located in monasteries and offered traditional education taught by monks, supplemented by some modern textbooks sent from Bangkok. In 1921, King Rama VI decreed compulsory elementary education, but in effect the situation did not change until after the revolution of 1932, except for the fact that elementary schools located in monasteries accepted girls as well as boys.

After the revolution, the education system was centralized, and the education system of the provinces was unified with that of Bangkok. While provincial schools continued to be located mostly in monasteries, the monks teaching in them were gradually replaced by professional teachers. This way, through a gradual rather than radical change from traditional education, Thailand has developed a modern education system, well suited to today's needs.

Education in present-day Thailand

The success of Thailand's system of education has been impressive. The country enjoys a literacy rate of nearly 91%, one of the highest in the developing world. In

recognition for this achievement, Thailand received the UNESCO Literacy Prize in 1987. The Thai school system consists of elementary schools for grades one through six, junior high schools for grades seven through nine, and senior high schools for grades ten through twelve. Compulsory education consists of the six years of elementary school, and according to official figures, 99.7% of all Thai children do attend elementary school. Since most of the population still engages in rice farming and other agricultural occupations, they are thought to have little need for more than basic education. However, nearly half of the students who graduate from elementary school continue their studies in secondary education institutions. The government is planning to have junior high school free and compulsory by 1997.

Higher education

Many high school graduates go on to college. The first university in Thailand was founded in 1917 by King Rama VI. It was named after his father King Rama V's princely name, Chulalongkorn. Before then, students who wished to receive higher education had to travel abroad, an option open only to the richest families. Although many more universities have been opened since, Chulalongkorn University has maintained its reputation as Thailand's premier university and is regarded as one of the finest educational institutions in Southeast Asia.

One other university rivals the level of Chulalongkorn University: Thammasat University, founded in 1934. Specializing in social sciences, and particularly political science, it has been the center of pro-democracy activities since its foundation. Both the revolution of 1973, which ushered in a period of democracy, and the crushing of the democracy movement in 1976 started at Thammasat University. Thammasat University also played an important role in the pro-democracy demonstrations which led to the toppling of the military dictatorship in 1992.

Other important universities include Silpakorn University, which specializes in art (including applied and decorative arts), and Kasetsat University, which focuses on agriculture.

In addition to the universities described above and several other universities which are located in Bangkok, universities have also been opened in the provinces. They include Chiang Mai University, serving the northern region; Khon Kaen University in the northeast; and Prince of Songkhla University, which caters to the educational needs of the south.

All in all there are 16 public universities in Thailand, as well as 36 teacher training colleges, and twelve private universities. There is also a prestigious military academy, the Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy, which has produced most of

the country's military leaders. Between 1967 and 1992, the number of Thai university students grew from 38,000 to over 750,000, a twenty-fold increase in 25 years.

DID YOU KNOW? King Rama IX, Queen Sirikit, or one of their children takes part in all public university graduation ceremonies held in the country. They personally present the diploma to every single graduate.

Health

Modern medicine was first introduced in Thailand during the reign of King Rama IV, mostly by Christian missionaries. Until then, health care in Thailand was restricted to folk doctors who treated illnesses with herbs, amulets, and incantations. King Rama IV's half-brother, Prince Wongsathirat, became the first Thai doctor to practice modern medicine, earning a degree by correspondence from a medical school in Philadelphia.

The first hospital in Thailand was opened in Bangkok during King Rama V's reign. Much of the earlier public health efforts were directed towards the eradication of tuberculosis and malaria, which together caused more deaths than all other diseases combined.

DID YOU KNOW? When one of King Rama V's favorite sons, Prince Siriraj, took ill, the palace doctors could do nothing to save him, because they lacked modern equipment. The king was greatly saddened by this tragic event, and realized the need for modern hospitals to serve his people. He then commissioned the building of Thailand's first hospital, which was named Siriraj Hospital after the dead prince.

By the 1990s, the government had achieved its goal of making at least basic medical services available to all of its citizens. Every subdistrict has at least one medical center, and there is a hospital in every district. In every province capital there is also at least one large hospital providing specialized care. About 70% percent of the hospitals in Thailand are government-owned and provide service free of charge. The remainder are privately owned, where those who can afford it can rent private rooms and receive more personal care.

The achievements of Thailand's public health system are impressive. In the 20 years between 1970 and 1990, the infant mortality rate (the death rate of babies and young children) dropped by more than half, from 7.5% to 3%. Maternal mortality rate (the rate of mothers who die at childbirth) dropped more than seven times, from 2.3% to

.3%. Life expectancy rose from 58 to 63 years for males, and from 62 to 68 years for females. And the natural rate of increase (the rate in which the population grows) dropped from an average of 3.4% annually during the 1960s to 1.3% in the early 1990s.

Despite these achievements, some serious health problems still remain. The air quality in industrialized urban areas (especially in Bangkok) is rapidly deteriorating. Bangkok now rivals Mexico City as the city with the poorest air quality in the world; air pollution is said to have a detrimental effect on the intellectual development of children in the city's most polluted districts. Water pollution is also a major problem; rapid industrialization has led to the contamination of most of Thailand's rivers, which serve as the main source of water for a large segment of the population. Noise pollution, originating mainly from cars but also from aircraft and construction work, is also reaching dangerous proportions.

The latest major health threat to Thais comes from the spread of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS). Thai society has always been liberal in regard to sex, and drug use as well as prostitution are rife. The danger of an AIDS epidemic is further exacerbated by popular misinterpretation of Buddhist teachings. Many Thai Buddhists believe that people die when their time comes, and there is nothing they can do to change their fate. They therefore fail to take precautions and avoid danger.

Communication

In the past, the sole provider of postal and telecommunication services in Thailand was the PTD (Post and Telegraph Department), a government bureau under the Ministry of Transport and Communications. Later, two government enterprises were established to take over most of the duties formerly held by the PTD. These are the Telephone Organization of Thailand (TOT) and the Communication Authority of Thailand (CAT).

The Telephone Organization of Thailand operates local and domestic long distance telephone services, as well as service to adjoining countries. There are currently 1.5 million telephone lines in Thailand, or about 2.5 per 100 inhabitants. There are about 1 million lines in Bangkok, leaving only 500,000 for the remaining population, or only about 1 line per 1,000 inhabitants in the provinces. Most subscribers are government agencies and businesses, rather than private families.

In 1992, the government signed a deal to provide an additional 3 million telephone lines. However, the deal fell through after the collapse of the military dictatorship, when it was discovered that members of the military-controlled government had demanded about 80 million dollars in bribes from the company which was supposed

to install the new lines. In return for this money, the corrupt officials agreed to pay grossly inflated prices for the installation of the telephone lines, costing the country billions of dollars. It was reported in the press that had dictator Suchinda's government stayed in power for three days longer than it did, the booty would have already been divided among the corrupt officials.

The Communication Authority of Thailand (CAT) is responsible for the postal services, telegraph, telex, fax service, and long distance telephone service to countries that do not border Thailand. This leaves the Post and Telegraph Department with only limited duties: providing satellite services, and administering frequency registration.

The monarchy

Since the establishment of the earliest Thai states and until the revolution of 1932, the Thais were ruled by an absolute monarch. The monarch stood above the law and was the final authority on everything which took place in the kingdom. The "absoluteness" of the monarch varied from king to king; it probably peaked during the reign of King Rama V. Although a caring and beloved monarch who accomplished great achievements for his country, his rule was extremely autocratic. Decisions effecting every facet of life in Thailand were directly decided by him. The position of semi-hereditary rulers in the provinces declined as power was centralized in Bangkok. Even in Bangkok itself, the nobility lost much of its power, as Rama V appointed his loyal younger brothers (and later sons) to fill practically all high government positions.

King Rama VI's reign brought about drastic changes. Since he was not very close to other members of his family, Rama VI appointed friends rather than relatives to high government posts. As the economic situation in the country deteriorated, he did not reduce his own extravagant spending, thus exacerbating the situation. Through his actions, Rama VI alienated his own family and enjoyed little popular support. Consequently, when he died in 1925, the status of the monarchy was considerably weaker than it had been during his father's reign.

His successor Rama VII inherited a weakened throne, and immediately took steps to restore the monarchy to its former glory. His efforts were hampered by the economic recession the world was experiencing in the early 1930s, as well as by a lack of cooperation from members of his own family. They feared his plan to turn the country into a constitutional monarchy would diminish their power. After the revolution of 1932, and especially after Rama VII's self-imposed exile and abdication, the status of the monarchy sank to an all-time low.

During the ten years which followed the abdication of King Rama VII in 1935, the monarchy played practically no role in Thai society. King Rama VIII was still a boy, studying in faraway Switzerland. Under Prime Minister Phibun's orders, people were forbidden to display pictures of Rama VII even in their own home. Rama VIII's return to Thailand in 1945 stirred some emotions in the people, who looked up to the monarch as a beacon of hope during the hardships of the post-war period. However, after the mysterious death of the young king the following year, the new king Rama IX returned to Switzerland to complete his studies, and the monarchy again disappeared from the limelight of Thai life.

The situation changed little after the return of King Rama IX from Europe and his coronation in 1951. By this time, anti-royalist Phibun was prime minister again, and under his orders the new king was assigned a very limited, purely ceremonial role. However, the situation started to change after Phibun's removal from power in 1957, and especially when Sarit Thanarat became prime minister in 1959. Sarit promoted traditional Thai values, which included an important role for the monarchy. Under his encouragement, King Rama IX took an increasingly active role in public life. He presided over religious ceremonies, was visited and consulted by the prime minister and other decision makers, and his picture was displayed in all public places.

Since that period, the status of the monarchy has been constantly on the rise, mostly due to the tireless efforts of the royal family on behalf of their people. This became apparent especially during the revolution of 1973, when the king let it be known that he supported pro-democracy forces. This lead to the removal from power of the repressive regime of Prime Minister Thanom, and a three-year period of democracy.

Today, the king and other members of the royal family are greatly respected by people in of all walks of life. Their pictures are hung everywhere--in offices, shops, on public buildings, and in private homes. The king is unquestionably the most widely respected person in the country, and his status (though not political power) is equivalent to that enjoyed by his grandfather King Rama V.

The royal family

King Rama IX was born in 1927 as Prince Bhumibol Adulyadej. His father, Prince Mahidol, was King Rama VII's younger brother. The young Prince Bhumibol, who never expected to become king, spent most of his childhood studying in Switzerland. Prince Mahidol, next in succession after any sons Rama VII would have, died in 1929; King Rama VII, who had no children, abdicated in 1935. Rama VII's nephew Prince Anand thus became the new king, and after he died in 1946, his younger brother

Prince Bhumibol inherited the throne. He completed his studies in Europe and returned to Thailand in 1951.

DID YOU KNOW? King Rama IX was not born in Bangkok, nor anywhere else in Thailand. He was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where his father was studying medicine and his mother was studying nursing.

While on a visit to France, Prince Bhumibol met Princess Sirikit, daughter of the Thai ambassador there. The two fell in love and were engaged. A week before Prince Bhumibol's coronation as King Rama IX, the couple were married.

In 1955, King Rama IX made history by becoming the first monarch to visit the northeast, until then the country's most remote and neglected region. The arduous three-week journey was the first in a series of hundreds of such trips, which would become the king's hallmark. Since then, the king and queen have been spending about half of their time in the outer provinces, touring towns and villages, meeting ordinary people and hearing about their problems firsthand.

Upon returning to Bangkok from such trips, the king initiates small-scale projects to help solve specific problems he had encountered during his trip. For example, if a certain area lacks water for irrigation, the king might initiate the building of a reservoir; if a river has become depleted of fish, he may supply the local residents with young fish for breeding; if a hill tribe village is left without a source of income because of opium eradication programs, he suggests suitable substitute crops and provides the villagers with appropriate training. All in all, the royal couple has initiated more than 1,000 projects in all parts of the country.

DID YOU KNOW? King Rama IX has a wide range of interests. In his younger years, he enjoyed car racing and sailing, and won a gold medal in sailing at the Southeast Asia Peninsula Games. Other hobbies of his include painting and photography. His favorite hobby, though, is playing and composing jazz music. The king plays the saxophone, and used to hold jam sessions with the students at Chulalongkorn University. His jazz compositions are featured regularly on Thai radio and television stations.

According to the constitution, the king is the head of the armed forces, and the upholder of all religions in the kingdom. While the first title is purely ceremonial--the king plays no military role--the second title is quite meaningful. The king often participates in important religious ceremonies, not only of his own Buddhist faith, but also in Hindu, Muslim, and other ceremonies as well. While supporting Buddhist

temples, he also contributes to the building and maintenance of mosques and churches.

While King Rama IX concentrates his efforts on agricultural projects, Queen Sirikit focuses her attention on preserving and protecting Thailand's natural and cultural heritage. She has initiated many conservation projects, such as a bird sanctuary in Chonburi Province and a wild turtle conservation project for which she donated a royally-owned island in Rayong Province. The queen's largest conservation project is a nature reserve in Chaiyaphum Province which covers 40,000 acres. For her efforts, the queen received several international awards, among them the World Wildlife Fund Conservation Award.

During her extensive travels in the country, the queen noticed that traditional arts and crafts were rapidly disappearing in the face of modernization. In order to preserve this important part of Thailand's cultural heritage, she established a special foundation which promotes arts and crafts. The foundation set up training centers in each of the country's regions, where unemployed people as well as housewives and farmers who wish to supplement their income can learn traditional arts and crafts. A group which receives special attention at the centers are the handicapped, especially disabled soldiers. Workshops were also set up, the best known of which is Bangsai Center in Ayutthaya province, as well as shops that market the products of the projects. The queen actively promotes the use of traditional arts and crafts, uses handwoven silk, traditional woven handbags, and other arts and crafts items in all her public appearances in Thailand and abroad.

The royal couple have four children. The eldest, Princess Ubolratana, was born in 1951. She married an American, and now lives in San Diego with her husband and children.

The king and queen's only son is Prince Vajiralongkorn, born in 1952. When he came of age in 1972, the king officially designated him crown prince, destined to eventually inherit the throne.

In 1955, the royal couple had another daughter, Princess Sirindhorn, who soon became a favorite of the Thai people. She made history by not going abroad to study, as has been the custom in the royal family, choosing instead to show her faith in the Thai educational system by studying at Chulalongkorn University. After completing her B.A. in history with first class honors, she went on to receive an M.A. degree in oriental epigraphy (reading and interpreting ancient documents) and a Ph.D. in education from two other Thai universities.

More than anyone else, Princess Sirindhorn has assisted her parents in their many duties. In recognition of her efforts on behalf of her country, she was promoted in

1978, and awarded an elaborate royal title popularly translated in English as "crown princess". Later, the country's constitution was amended to allow women as well as men to become monarchs.

In the 1980s, the king and queen stopped accepting invitations to travel abroad, preferring instead to devote all of their time to their country. Since then, Princess Sirindhorn has been travelling to every corner of the globe, representing her parents and her country. Upon her return from such trips, she publishes travelogues accompanied by photographs, which consistently become best-sellers. For many Thais, these travelogues constitute the main source of information about life in other countries.

The youngest daughter of the royal couple is Princess Chulabhorn. She was born in 1957, and in 1982 married a Thai air force officer. Although he was a commoner, she petitioned the king to retain the princely title for herself and her children, and her request was granted. Princess Chulabhorn has established experimental farms and villages in several parts of the country.

The king's mother was officially referred to as the Princess Mother, but the people fondly nicknamed her *Somdej Ya*, meaning "Royal Granny". After celebrating her 90th birthday in 1991, she continued to play an active in public life, almost until her death in 1995. In her self-appointed capacity as matron of the border patrol, the Princess Mother travelled to the country's most remote areas to present patrolmen with special foods and other items aimed at making their service easier. The Princess Mother also established a medical volunteer organization, which sends thousands of doctors and nurses to treat patients in remote areas during weekends.

DID YOU KNOW? The Princess Mother's life story was a classic tale of rags-to-riches. She was born to a simple family, living in a small apartment in one of Bangkok's poorer neighborhoods, and was orphaned at an early age. One day her arm got badly hurt and developed an inflammation. One of her friends, who was working as a maid at the Royal Palace, asked permission to take her to the palace clinic. She ended up being hospitalized there for weeks, and became interested in health care. After having recovered, she stayed on to work as a nurse's assistant, and after several years received a royal scholarship to study nursing in Cambridge, Massachusetts. During that time the king's younger brother, Prince Mahidol, was studying medicine in Harvard, and the king asked him to take care of all Thai students in the Boston area. The young nursing student met the prince, the couple fell in love, and the rest is history.

Summary

Ancient Thai society was organized in a family-like structure. The important political unit was the *muang*, a city-state ruled by a chief called *chao*. The earliest Thai kings conformed to this social structure, and saw themselves as fathers of their people. Later, due to Khmer influence, the king's position became holy and remote. The first to form an organized government was King Trailok of Ayutthaya, and his *sakdi na* ranking system remained intact for more than four centuries. In 1888, King Rama V reformed the government and patterned it after European governments. The 1932 revolution abolished the absolute monarchy, and since then political power has been concentrated in the hands of the prime minister.

The Thai government is divided into the judicial, legislative, and administrative branches, with the military enjoying a special status. Local administration consists of 73 provinces, divided into districts, sub-districts, and villages. The public health and education systems were modernized by King Rama V, and have had impressive accomplishments, though some serious challenges still remain.

UNIT 12 Student Activities

Debate topic

Some claim that the monastic education system was more suitable for Thailand's needs than the Western-style education system that replaced it. Should education have been left optional and in the hands of monks?

Assignments

A. Library tasks

1. Compare the structure of the Thai Parliament to that of the U.S. Congress. How many chambers are in each? How many representatives? How many senators?

2. What are Thailand's ministries and ministers equivalent to in the U.S. government system? How many "ministries" are there in the states, and how do their roles compare to those of Thai ministries?

B. Review questions

1. Explain the Thai terms *muang* and *chao*.

2. What is the god-king cult? Where did it originate and how did it influence the Thai monarchy?

3. What were King Trailok's contributions to the development of government and public administration in Thailand?

4. What are the branches of the modern Thai government, and what are the responsibilities of each branch?

5. How many instances of appeal are there in Thailand? What are they?

6. What has been the role of the military in Thailand's government?

7. How did Thai children get education in former days?

8. When was Thailand's education system modernized, and how was this achieved?

9. What are the achievements of Thailand's public health system?

10. What serious health problems are Thais facing today?

11. What three bodies provide communication services in Thailand, and what are the responsibilities of each one?

12. Describe in brief the changing role of the monarchy since the reign of King Rama V.

13. King Rama IX is not a son of a king. How then did he come to ascend the throne?

14. What kind of projects have Thailand's king and queen initiated?

15. How did Thailand come to have both a crown prince and a crown princess?

C. Creative thought

1. Compare the education system in Thailand to the one in the US. Into what levels are schools divided? How many grades are in each level? How many years of schooling are compulsory?

2. If you were Thailand's health minister, what actions would you take to halt the spread of AIDS in your country?

Chapter 13: Thai Teenagers

Thai society can be roughly divided into two groups. On the one hand, there are urban Thais, those who live and work in the cities. Their lives have been influenced by Western lifestyles, and resemble the lives of people in any other modern city around the world. On the other hand, there are rural Thais (those living and working in the villages), who still make up the large majority of the population. Villages, while having undergone considerable development since the 1970s, can still give us a glimpse of how life used to be in the past. On the whole, rural Thais have preserved more folk traditions and old lifestyles than their urban counterparts.

In the following pages, you will find the stories of two Thai teenagers, one from the city and one from the country. The stories are based on a series of interviews with two real persons.

A teenager from the country

We met the bright 16-year-old girl at her employers' house in Bangkok. She told us her name is Wassana, "but most people call me Waht." Dressed in Hawaiian-style shorts and a matching T-shirt, Waht looks not much different from any American her age. But it is doubtful any American youth will ever find herself in Waht's position. This is because Waht works as a servant. She has been working, either as a factory worker or a servant, since she was 12.

Waht comes from a village called Huay Kho in Thailand's arid, impoverished northeast. Like most teenagers from her village, she had to go to work in the city, but she still considers the village her home, and goes back there whenever she is on holiday. With about 200 families, the village is average sized. The village houses are all wooden, and built on poles, which leaves the area under the house free. "The oldest houses have thatched roofs," says Waht, "but most houses now have corrugated iron roofs." In most houses there is only one room, which serves as the living room and bedroom. "I used to sleep with my sister and brothers inside, while Mom and Dad slept on the porch," she recalls. The family does all their cooking, eating, and bathing in the open area under the house. Around the house, there are papaya and mulberry trees, as well as some vegetables and even flowers.

Each house in the village usually has about four or five residents: a married couple, those of their children who still live at home, and sometimes a parent. In Thai villages, older people do not live by themselves; they stay with their children and grandchildren. Unmarried adults never move out of their parents' house, and when they get old they invite a niece or a nephew to live with them.

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Most families in the villages have four or five children, but one or more of the children is often away, working in the city. At least one of the children will always live at home. "According to our custom, it is the duty of the youngest child to stay home and take care of his or her parents as they grow old," says Waht. The youngest child will often never get married, and devote his or her life to caring for the parents.

(Here we would like to add that in older days, Thai villagers had many more children than today. Women would often give birth to more than ten children, but because of bad nutrition and health conditions, many of them would die before reaching puberty. After World War II, living conditions improved significantly, and the government built clinics and hospitals in all provinces. Thus in the following years, although people continued to have many children, most of them survived. For example, Waht's father has no fewer than eleven living brothers and sisters.

While the villagers were certainly happy that their children were not dying anymore, it was hard for the parents to support such big families. The situation became more complicated as the children grew up and had families of their own. Suppose a family needs ten acres of rice fields to produce enough food to survive. If the parents have twelve living children, when they die, each child will inherit less than one acre, which can supply only a fraction of his or her family's needs. Unfortunately, at about the same time Thailand was undergoing this population explosion, it was also running out of unused arable land. That is why so many people now have to go to the cities to look for work.

The government realized the seriousness of the problem, and launched a massive birth control campaign. At first, it seemed to succeed only in Bangkok, where most couples who married since the 1970s have averaged only one or two children. Couples in the countryside continued to have more children, although not as many as before. In the 1980s, however, the government slogan "Many children make you poor" finally made its impact on rural communities as well, and since then, most village families have been having only two or three children per family.)

Waht's parents got married in the mid 1970s, and had four children. The oldest daughter, now 18, left for the city when she was only twelve. "We hardly see her nowadays," says Waht, "she doesn't like to come to village anymore." Waht also has two younger brothers, ages 11 and 14. The younger one is still in school, completing his six years of compulsory elementary education. The older one has been working since graduating from elementary school, sewing decorations on jackets destined for export. People from the city bring him the jackets, and he decorates them at home. "He earns lots of money," says Waht. "sometimes a hundred baht a day, sometimes even more!" A hundred baht is equivalent to about $4.

Waht's parents are rice farmers. They grow glutinous rice, the variety preferred by the people of the northeast. During the rice growing season, Waht's father has to leave for the field very early in the morning. The family wakes up before sunrise, and Waht's mother prepares breakfast: glutinous rice with some grilled fish, chili pepper dip, and anything left over from last night's dinner. After breakfast, Waht's father goes out to the field, while she stays home with her mother to take care of the cows and the chickens.

Waht's family also has a vegetable garden, where they grow cucumbers, eggplants, tomatoes, and herbs. They also grow various fruits: bananas, tamarinds, papayas, guavas, and limes. Except for bananas, none of these fruits are eaten as is. Tamarinds and limes are used as condiments for sour dishes, papayas are used for making *som-tam* (green papaya salad), and guavas are eaten when they are still green and crunchy, dipped in a mixture of sugar, salt, and chili pepper.

When there is urgent work to be done in the field, the entire family pitches in. "During the harvest season," tells Waht, "children get time off from school, so that they can help their parents, because the rice has to be harvested as soon as it's ripe." Waht's father then leaves for the field before sunrise together with her two brothers, and later her mother brings them breakfast and lunch. The main lunch dish is *som-tam*, a salad made of green papaya and raw beans. It is eaten--needless to say--with plenty of glutinous rice. The meal can be made more interesting by adding *para'*, another typical northeastern dish, made from mashed fermented fish. On special occasions the family also eats broiled chicken, but that's considered to be an expensive and luxurious food.

"Of course, when I'm home, I help Mom and Dad," says Waht. "I try to go home every year during the harvest season, and then we all work together in the field. It's hard work, but in the evenings we have parties in the village, with singing and dancing and lots of drinking too."

Villagers also work sewing clothes for companies from the city and making silk. Every girl and woman is expected to know how to spin and weave silk. In the backyard of Waht's house, there are mulberry trees where her family grows silkworms. Before leaving for the city, Waht used to help her mother in the long and complicated process of making silk.

Silk is made out of cocoons which the silkworms spin around themselves during the stage when they are changing from larvae to moths. First, Waht and her mother have to collect the cocoons in baskets just at the right time. "If we're late, the moth gets out of the cocoon, which destroys it." The unopened cocoons are thrown into boiling water, which dissolve the gum which had kept them together. "My job is to fish the individual 'hair' of silk out of the boiling water with a bamboo fork. It's hard

enough fishing the tiny, slippery pieces, but I have to do it through a small hole in the cover of the pot, to make sure I'm getting one piece at a time." The individual pieces are attached together to form one thread, and kept in a basket.

Now comes the cleaning process. The initial boiling does not dissolve all the gum, which still sticks to the thread, making it tough. The thread has to be boiled again, this time together with the ashes of certain plants which are said to remove the gum. "We have to boil and wash the thread again and again, until it becomes totally clean and very soft."

But the thread is not yet ready to be used. The single thread is too thin for weaving, and can be easily torn. So Waht's mother uses a spinning wheel to twist two threads around each other, to form a stronger, thicker thread. For special purposes, as in material for wedding dresses, four threads are spun together to make an extra-thick thread.

So now can you finally use the thread for weaving the cloth? "Not yet", laughs Waht. "First you have to decide what color you want." The natural color of silk is yellow, so if another color is desired, it first has to be bleached and then dyed. A piece of fabric consists of thread or yarn woven in two directions, vertical and horizontal, called *weft* and *warp*. To obtain plain-colored silk, both weft and warp can be in the same color. However, the most prized product of the northeast, *mudmee* silk, has complicated patterns, which require an intricate tie-dying process, described in Chapter 8.

Although mudmee silk is prized all over the world and commands high prices, village women use it for making their everyday garment, a kind of skirt called *phathung*. Men wear sarongs, rectangular pieces of cloth wrapped around the lower body, usually made out of plaid cotton. "But young people don't want to wear these clothes anymore," Waht hastens to add. "They're too old-fashioned. Most of us just wear pants and T-shirts. I'm a little different from my friends, because I like wearing shorts even when I'm in the village. Most of my friends, especially girls, prefer long pants because they are considered more proper."

We asked Waht what she wants to do when she grows up, but she seemed a bit puzzled. It seemed she had never given the matter any thought. "I suppose I will go back to my village," she finally said. And what will she do there? "Oh, there is always plenty to do. Work in the field, take care of the animals, weave cloth..." So is she planning to stay with her parents and work with them? "Of course. Why should I want to stay anywhere else?"

Waht had heard stories that once there used to be a lush forest next to her village. The trees had all been felled before she was born, and the wood used for building houses, making furniture, and as firewood. Now the area where the forest used to

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stand has been planted with bamboo. The villagers use bamboo for construction and also for weaving baskets and cages. Waht also knows how to use bamboo in order to weave the typical northeastern lunch boxes for glutinous rice, called *kratip*. "I used to make money making *kratip*s and selling them to people. It only takes me a couple of days to make one, and I could get 40 baht ($1.60) for it. But what I like most about bamboo is its shoots," Waht adds smiling. That's because bamboo shoots, either fresh or fermented, are considered a delicacy.

When the family needs to do some shopping, Waht's mother goes to the nearest town, because there is no market in the village. "She has to leave the house at four or five in the morning, and ride a *song thaew* (pickup truck converted into a bus) to the market. If she gets there too long after sunrise, the choice produce will be already gone. After eight or nine, there is hardly anything left at all." The market is located in the district center, and villagers from all over the district come to buy and sell household items, fish, fruits, vegetables, and (on special occasions) meat.

One of the problems in Waht's village is how to get drinking water. "The government dug a canal leading up to the village, but the water is only good for irrigation," she notes. There are also some ponds and wells, but the water there is suitable only for bathing or washing clothes, not for drinking. "For drinking, we use rainwater." How do the villagers catch the rainwater? "On the roof of each house, there is a water catchment system. It drains all the rain that falls during the rainy season into jars." Each one of these huge jars holds forty or fifty gallons, but every family still needs to have quite a few of them, because the water has to last throughout the year. In drought years when the rainfall is not sufficient, the villagers are forced to boil brackish well water for drinking.

In the village there is one wat (Thai temple), and next to it, an elementary school. There, the village children learn math, social studies, a little English, and another language which is also somewhat foreign to them: Standard Thai. Before entering school, the only place they hear Standard Thai is on the radio and TV, because the people of the northeast use a different language, close to Laotian.

Waht admits that she "was a very naughty student in school. So the teacher had to hit me with a ruler almost every day. But I didn't mind, because I deserved it." Corporal punishment is a common form of disciplinary action in Thai schools.

Every day at noon, the children go home to have a lunch of glutinous rice and *som-tam*. Sometimes this basic menu is supplemented by frogs, snakes, and catfish, which the children catch themselves and grill over open fire. After lunch, they go back to school for their afternoon classes. When school is over, many students prefer not to go home right away, but to stay and play ball games in the schoolyard. "The boys play soccer and *takraw*, and the girls play other games. But I play *takraw* well, so the

boys let me play with them," Waht says proudly. (As we mentioned in chapter 10, *takraw* is a Thai game played with a woven wicker ball.)

Like most other children in her village, Waht completed only the six compulsory years of elementary education. Students who wish to continue their education have to go to town; most families, however, cannot afford this luxury. This is not because tuition fees are too high--public education is free in Thailand through high school--but because older children have to work to help their families. When not actually working with their parents in the fields, older children have to take care of their younger brothers and sisters, feed the animals, clean the house, water the vegetable patch, weave cloth, or sew garments for city-based companies. If the family is short on cash, some of the children have to go to work in the city, either as factory workers or as domestic servants, like Waht. They send the money that they earn to their parents.

A popular hobby among the villagers, adults as well as teenagers, is cockfighting. Some people raise and train roosters especially to serve as gamecocks. When the villagers decide to organize a cockfight, they gather in an open area of the village, divide into two groups, choose a referee, and make markings in the dirt where the "arena" will be. When everything is ready, the roosters are let out of their cages, and they fight until one of them dies. In a less cruel version, they only fight until one of the roosters tries to run away, and then the other one is declared the winner. The game is accompanied by gambling and drinking, which often lead to violence. Gambling is illegal in Thailand, but very widespread. Cockfighting itself, though, is legal. In the US, cockfighting is banned, because it is regarded as a form of cruelty to animals, but it is still practiced in some rural areas.

A relatively new form of entertainment which is quickly replacing more traditional pastimes is watching TV. "I watch at least one show a day, even when there's lots of work to be done," Waht admits. Most other families also have TV sets. Other electrical appliances which can be found in Waht's house are a radio, an electric fan, and lamps. Although all the houses in the village have electricity, none have running water. This is still considered to be a luxury beyond dreams. How about telephones? "Telephones?!" chuckles Waht, barely able to hold back her laughter. "I never even saw a real phone before coming to work in Bangkok."

Waht left home to work in the city after graduating from elementary school, when she was 12. First, she went to work at a factory in Samut Prakan, a province just south of Bangkok. She worked six days a week from six in the morning until six in the evening, running a weaving machine. The workers, most of them children like her, only got a one-hour break for lunch. For this work, Waht received 800 baht ($32) a month, and a place to sleep at the factory. Waht doesn't think she was treated unfairly, and actually has overall good memories of that period: "Work was very easy;

all I had to do is press a few buttons. I could even sit down during work if I wanted too. Every Sunday I would go to the beach with my friends from work, and we all had a good time." So why did she leave? "Ghosts. I never actually saw them, but at night when I had to sleep in the factory, I could sense they were all around me. I wasn't getting any sleep, so I decided it was time to leave."

Waht quit her job and went back to the village. Her friends in the city kept writing to her about job opportunities, but she turned down all the offers. She didn't want to leave the village again so soon, and her parents didn't make her to go back to the city, even though they needed the money. Then her aunt from Bangkok offered to take her to work at the same house where the aunt herself was working. She promised Waht she wouldn't be alone, and more importantly--she wouldn't have to sleep by herself. Waht accepted the offer, and has been working at the same house now for three years.

Waht confesses that she had already made up her mind to quit and go back home, "because I'm beginning to get bored here." But then her parents took an advance of 10,000 baht out of her future salary, in order to fix their house. So she will have to stay on until she repays the debt out her salary--about seven or eight months' time.

What are Waht's duties and chores as a servant? "I get up every day at five, and first wash the car and sweep the floor. Then I help take care of the children. After the children have eaten, we servants have a big breakfast. Then throughout the day there is always something to do." Like what? "Oh, help in the kitchen, rake the lawn, water the flowers, do the laundry, play with the baby. That's what I like best, playing with the baby." Despite her long list of chores, Waht's life conditions in Bangkok are far from miserable. At the house where she works, she shares a room with another girl (she insisted on having a roommate, because she was afraid to sleep by herself). The servants also have their own bathroom. Every morning, the boss gives them money to buy whatever they like for lunch; usually they choose northeastern food. After lunch, they have some free time. "I usually don't know what to do, so I just take a nap." In the evening, the servants share the same food that the family has for dinner. Then they watch TV together with the family until late at night.

The servants have few expenses, because their employer buys them clothes, takes them to the doctor whenever they are not feeling well, gives them bonuses on holidays, grants them paid leaves to go home several times a year, and even pays for the transportation. So they can save most of their wages, and send them to their families in the village.

We asked Waht where she prefers staying, in the village or in the city. "In the village, of course!" she answered without hesitation. But in the village she has to share the same room with many people, there is no bathroom, no money, and not

enough food? "Maybe, but that's my home. I'm free there. Nobody tells me what to do. Sure, I work in the field and help with the housework, but I like helping my parents. And besides, in the village I can spend time with my friends and play soccer and *takraw* every day."

A teenager from the city

At the end of an alley in one of Bangkok's residential areas, surrounded by a well-tended garden, stands a little cottage. This is the home of the Sirivat family: Teung, a public prosecutor; Pot, his wife, a homemaker; and May, their 17-year-old daughter. May is an only child, a rare phenomenon in the past, but now quite common among middle- and upper-class urban families.

The Sirivat family is, however, different from most other modern Bangkok families in one respect. While most women in Bangkok now work outside their home, Pot chose to be a housewife instead. She enjoys cooking and taking care of the house and the garden. The family therefore does not have a maid, which is very unusual for families of their status. Most upper middle-class families in Bangkok have at least one or two live-in maids.

When May was a little girl, she and her parents lived in a large house together with their extended family: great-grandparents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and many cousins. "It was an old house surrounded by lawns and trees. When you were inside, you couldn't see or hear the city. It was like living in the country. We even had squirrels and songbirds. Every morning, the family van would take me and my cousins to school. In the evenings, we would all have dinner together, but at *four* sittings, because there wasn't enough room for everyone around the table."

"In the garden, there was a large pond with huge golden carp. Even though the pond was about 3 meters (9 feet) deep, the water was so clear you could see the bottom. On hot days, we would go swimming in the pond, and then have dinner in a pavilion built over the water in the middle of the pond. Or we would play hide-and-seek in the jungle that covered the huge backyard. We had lots of fun in those days."

But the big old house had one big old problem. Every year toward the end of the rainy season, the soil would get so saturated with rainwater that it could not absorb any more. All the rainwater would then drain into the pond, which would overflow and flood the house. Sometimes the ground floor would be submerged under more than a foot of water. "I remember that when my younger cousin was born and my aunt came back with him from the hospital, they had to use a rowboat to get from the street to the house. And once I was talking on the phone to a friend, when I suddenly saw a big goldfish swim right through the living room."

While the children enjoyed the adventure, the adults were less enthusiastic about the annual flooding. In former days, when Thai families lived in wooden houses elevated on piles, the problem was not as serious, because the living quarters were always above the high water level. But now that more and more city families live in Western style brick houses, the water floods the ground floors, causing a lot of damage to the furniture, the electric wiring, the carpets and the like. So, much to the children's sorrow, the family decided to sell the old house and move away. Beside the flooding problem, the adults in the family decided that life in one big house was no longer suitable for these changing times. Each nuclear family (a couple and their children) built their own new house, although they all still live next door to each other.

May is a 12th-grade student in a high school located at somewhat unusual surroundings: inside Chitralada Garden, the royal residence. The school was founded by King Rama IX in order to facilitate the education of the children of the royal family. Since the king did not wish the royal children to grow up without the company of other children, the school also accepts children of commoners who are in the civil or the military service.

School starts at 8:30 in the morning, but the students are required to arrive at school by 8:00. In the half-hour interval before classes start, the students raise the flag, sing the national anthem, and pray (prayer in schools, including public schools, is very common in Thailand). Even though the school is located near May's house (at least by Bangkok standards), she has to leave the house at 6:00 to make sure she gets there on time. "The morning rush hours are really terrible", May explains. "All Bangkok turns into one huge traffic jam. If I leave home after seven, it will take me over an hour to get to school, and then I'll be late. If I leave at six, it only takes about twenty minutes. So I prefer to spend some extra time in school rather than swim in traffic. I usually find an empty bench and sleep until eight. Sometimes the school nurse lets me nap on the bed at the infirmary, but there's competition for that, because many others also show up very early in order to beat traffic."

At noon there is a one-hour break, when the students have lunch at the school canteen. Then classes resume until 3:45. May normally gets home around five, "unless there is some extracurricular activity, like a concert. Then I won't be home before six."

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The curriculum of May's school is divided into two tracks, of which the students have to choose one. Students in the Arts Track take mostly language and literature classes (Thai, English, French) and social studies. Those who take the science track have to take math, chemistry, biology, and physics. This is in addition to core subjects which have to be taken by everyone, like Thai history. May is in the Arts Track, which is more popular with girls. All students are also required to attend physical education classes and agriculture classes. The school has a garden where the students grow

various vegetables and herbs. "If the harvest is really good, the school sells the produce and gives the money to the student body. But if the vegetables don't look so presentable, we get to take them home and eat them ourselves." Elective subjects, which students in any track may take, include accounting, art, and computer programming.

Every Thursday afternoon, there are no classes. Instead, all the students gather at the auditorium for some special social activity. Sometimes the students perform satirical plays; on other occasions, they organize fashions shows or singing contests. "It's up to us to do what we like, as long as it's not too crazy," says May.

The students have a student organization with various elected officers. There are two presidents (one boy and one girl), a treasurer, and a secretary. The student organization is in charge of the many extracurricular activities the school offers. For example, the students have their own "radio station," which uses a public address system to "broadcast" programs throughout the school. Every morning before school starts, and sometimes during lunch break too, the students air a program which combines national news, school news, and music. "The students prefer playing heavy metal music at full volume but the teachers are always complaining about 'that terrible noise.' So one day a week, we play boring classical Thai music to make them happy."

Most extracurricular activities are in the form of student clubs. There is a Thai language club, history lovers club, social studies club, Buddhism club, Library Club, English Club, and French Club. There are also less academic clubs, devoted to cheerleading, community services, environmental awareness, and sports. "I'm a member of the photography club," says May, but after further questioning she shyly admits that "actually I'm president of the photography club."

Despite the generally relaxed atmosphere in school, discipline is actually quite strict. When passing by their teachers, the students have to lower their heads in respect. If a student approaches a seated teacher, he has to get down on his knees and bow. We asked what happens to disobedient students. "Officially, the standard punishment is being beaten with a stick. But in our school the parents made it known that they don't approve of corporal punishment. So instead the teacher gives a warning, and if it doesn't help, the offender is put on probation, and a letter is sent to his parents. For repeated offenses, the teachers use a card system, like in soccer games. First you get a 'yellow card,' which means some points off your final grade. If your behavior doesn't improve, you will get a red card, and be suspended from school for a certain period of time. The ultimate punishment is being expelled from school indefinitely."

Cutting class is not common in May's school, not because the students are well disciplined, but because it's hard to do. "All the classes are small, so the teachers

notice right away if someone is missing. And anyway, if you cut class, where would you go? The school is in the middle of the palace grounds, and nobody is going to let you roam around there. Once a couple of boys tried to sneak out of the palace grounds, but by the time they reached the palace gate, their teachers had already notified the palace guards that they were missing, and they were all escorted back to class."

A few weeks after the school year opens, schools in Thailand observe the *Wai Khru* ceremony. It is an ancient ceremony which goes back to the early days of the state and even to ancient India. *Wai Khru* means "greeting (or honoring) the teachers"; it is the occasion for students to express their respect and appreciation for their teachers. The ceremony begins with an invocation and prayers, followed by presenting each teacher with a basket containing flowers, candles, and joss sticks. Everyone has to listen to some speeches, and then the teachers and students use the rest of the day for charitable activities, such as visiting hospital patients and giving them flowers.

On Friday afternoons, the boys participate in a military training program similar to ROTC in the United States. Actually, the program is not compulsory, but boys who complete the program become commissioned military officers almost automatically, and don't have to serve their regular military duty. Needless to say, almost all boys choose to participate in the program.

What do the girls do in the meantime? "Up until a couple of years ago, nothing. We just hung around the schoolyard and chatted. But then the Crown Princess heard about it, and asked us to do something more useful. So now we use that time to help handicapped children or go to orphanages and play with the children." May's face suddenly turns sad. "I took care of a baby boy, and I loved him as if he were my own brother. I managed to convince my parents to adopt him. I was so happy! But then we found out that an American couple had already made arrangements to adopt him, and I never saw him again."

High school students in Bangkok don't go out much on weekday evenings. "We feel pretty exhausted after the long school day and travelling home during rush hours. Anyway, even if I wanted to go someplace, it would take hours to get anywhere. So we usually go out only on weekends and holidays." At night, May enjoys staying home talking to her parents, watching TV, or reading magazines. She doesn't listen much to music, "because Mom is in charge of the tape player. She grew up in the sixties, so she listens to sixties music all the time. You know, Beach Boys and that kind of stuff. So that's what I get to hear too. I don't know how much longer I can take her Elvis tapes."

Except for photography, May doesn't have any particular hobby, but she enjoys reading, watching movies, and playing sports. When she was a little girl, she collected stamps, but like most Thai children she gave up that hobby as she grew up. Her favorite game is tennis, which she plays either at school or at a sports club near her house. Her aunt tries to get her to collect stamps, because she thinks it's very educational, "but I'll take tennis anytime," she admits.

On weekends, May often goes to the movies with her friends. "The films we like most are foreign action movies: *Robocop*, *Aliens*, *Terminator*, that kind of stuff." Almost all films shown in Thailand are dubbed in Thai, "so we don't have to make an effort to understand the English or read subtitles." Sometimes May and her friends go to a discothèque, although then they have to take along a chaperon, usually an older brother or sister. "Once I went out for dinner with a group to celebrate a birthday of a friend. After dinner my Dad came to pick me up, but by then we had decided we wanted to go to a popular disco called NASA. So my Dad offered to give us a ride. We thought he would just drop us off and then come back to pick us up later. But since we didn't have a chaperon, he decided to be our chaperon. So he came in with us, still in his gray civil service uniform that he wore to work. You have to know that my Dad is over 50, and looks very serious and conservative. The guy at the entrance almost fell off his chair when he saw him going in the disco. He sat for hours in the middle of the disco waiting for us. Nobody could figure out what he was doing there..."

A less pleasant weekend activity for May is taking private lessons. We asked May, who is reputed to be a good student in school, why she needed private lessons. "I just don't have a choice," she replies. "Soon I have to take my university entrance exams, and without tutoring, I have no chance of passing, because everyone else is also taking private lessons." In the university, May would like to study art or archeology.

During holidays, May often goes on vacation with her parents. When she was a little girl, the entire extended family used to go to her grandparents' summer cottage in the village of Jomthien, near the resort town of Pattaya. They would stay anywhere from a weekend to several weeks at a time, just relaxing in the quiet village atmosphere and enjoying the pristine white sand beach. Then big development came to the village, spilling over from Pattaya. Multistory hotels sprang up along the beaches, surrounded by condominium towers and shopping centers. The quiet scene was invaded by thousands of tourists, who turned it into a center of noise and pollution. Even in the water, you could not avoid the pollution and the jet skis. Gradually, May's family stopped visiting their summer cottage, and recently they sold it.

Nowadays, May's parents choose other destinations for their vacation, not yet spoiled by development, where they can enjoy beautiful scenery, natural surroundings, and most of all--peace and quiet. Often, the main purpose of the trip is not recreation but a religious pilgrimage. "During the Buddhist Lent, we like to go to remote temples, to

offer food and gifts to the monks, and listen to sermons and *Mahachat* stories about the Buddha's lives. On the holiday of *Thot Kathin*, we buy new yellow robes to present to the monks. Sometimes we go to visit a monk who is famous for his wisdom, to pay respect to him and ask him for advice."

Religion plays an important role in May's life not just during holidays but every day. Around her neck, encapsuled in plastic and gold, is a Buddha amulet, which she wears everywhere. In her bedroom, secure on a high shelf, there is a Buddha image. Every night before going to bed, she focuses on the image and meditates. Sometimes on weekends she goes to Sunday school at a temple with some of her friends. "Nobody tells us to go; we like going there, because we are interested in Buddhist philosophy," she says.

Interestingly, although May's school is not a religious one by any means, religion plays an important role there too. In the main auditorium, there is an altar with Buddha images and other religious objects. Important Buddhist holidays are observed in school, and religious ceremonies are held on other special occasions. All students, regardless of their religion, have to attend classes in Buddhism. "And would you believe it? The best Buddhism student in my class happens to be a Muslim!"

May's school, although tuition-free and run by the royal household, is not considered to be a public school. However, the situation in public schools is not much different: Buddhist religious ceremonies are held there as well, and the Buddhist religion is taught. This is because of the lack of separation of church and state in Thailand. Buddhism is considered to be one of the pillars of Thai society, and religious minorities just have to adapt to that situation. It should be noted, though, that in public schools non-Buddhist students are exempted from Buddhism classes. In fact, in predominantly Muslim communities, Islam is taught in public schools instead of Buddhism.

We asked May what kids her age are most interested in. "Rock music, movie stars, TV, and sports." How about politics? "Some kids in my class, whose parents are in politics or in the military, are more interested than others. But generally we don't talk much about politics." How about the Bloody May events of 1992? "That was during the summer holidays. Besides, I wasn't here, because I just happened to go abroad on vacation with my cousins. But after I came back, I found out that some of my classmates went to see the demonstrations and the disturbances, and some even took pictures of the events."

Do high school kids in Thailand have boyfriends and girlfriends, like American kids do? "Yes, in my class there are some couples who go steady. But all that means is that when they are at school they spend their free time together. Sometimes after

school is over, a couple might go to have something to eat together, or to see a movie. But it's not usual for a boy to ask a girl out at night like we see in American movies." What do the parents think about their teenagers having boyfriends or girlfriends? "They don't mind, but most parents don't even know if their son or daughter has a boyfriend or a girlfriend. It's more of a school kind of thing."

Before leaving, we asked May what she would like to do after she finishes her studies. "When I was a little girl, I always wanted to be a public prosecutor, like my Dad. But now I am more attracted to art and archeology. If I could get a degree and find a job as an archeologist that'll be great. If not, I think I'd like to be an artist, do something with my hands. At any rate I don't want to do something that requires me to be in an office from nine to five." Who does?

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UNIT 13 Student Activities

Debate topic

There is some pressure in Thailand to enforce strict child-labor laws, which would prevent teenagers like Waht from going to work in the city. Should such laws be enforced? (Think of all the possible consequences for the children involved and their families.)

Assignments

A. Library task

Find out when elementary education became compulsory and free in the US. How many years were initially compulsory? In what period was the situation in the U.S. comparable to that in Thailand today?

B. Review questions

1. Where is Waht's village located, and what are houses there like?

2. How come families were much larger when Waht's father was a child than today?

3. What does Waht's family do to make a living?

4. Why do the villagers prefer eating *som-tam* (green papaya salad) to meat?

5. How is silk thread made?

6. What is the difference in terms of dress between Waht's generation and the older generation?

7. What happened to the woods which used to be next to the village?

8. What water sources are available to the villagers, and for what purposes is each water source used?

9. Why do Waht and her friends have learn to speak Thai in school? They are, after all, Thai.

10. Describe some of the pastimes of northeastern villagers.

11. Why did Waht have to leave home when she was 12? Where did she go?

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12. Why did May's extended family decide to move away from their old house, and split into nuclear families?

13. How come May has to leave for school so early in the morning?

14. Describe some of the extracurricular activities at May's school.

15. How are discipline problems handled?

16. What is the *Wai Khru* ceremony?

17. Why are boys and girls separated each Friday afternoon?

18. When and where do Bangkok high school students like to go for entertainment?

19. What role does religion play in school and in May's private life?

20. What are May's hobbies or pastimes?

21. Do Thai teenagers date like American kids?

C. Creative thought

1. Waht prefers to live in the village, although it has certain disadvantages compared to her life in the city. Discuss the plus and minuses of life in the country as opposed to life in the city.

2. Suppose May and you were pen-pals. Write her a letter, describing your life compared to hers.

3. What strikes you as most unusual in May's school? How similar is it to your school? If you were a student there, which aspects would you like to change, and which ones would you keep?

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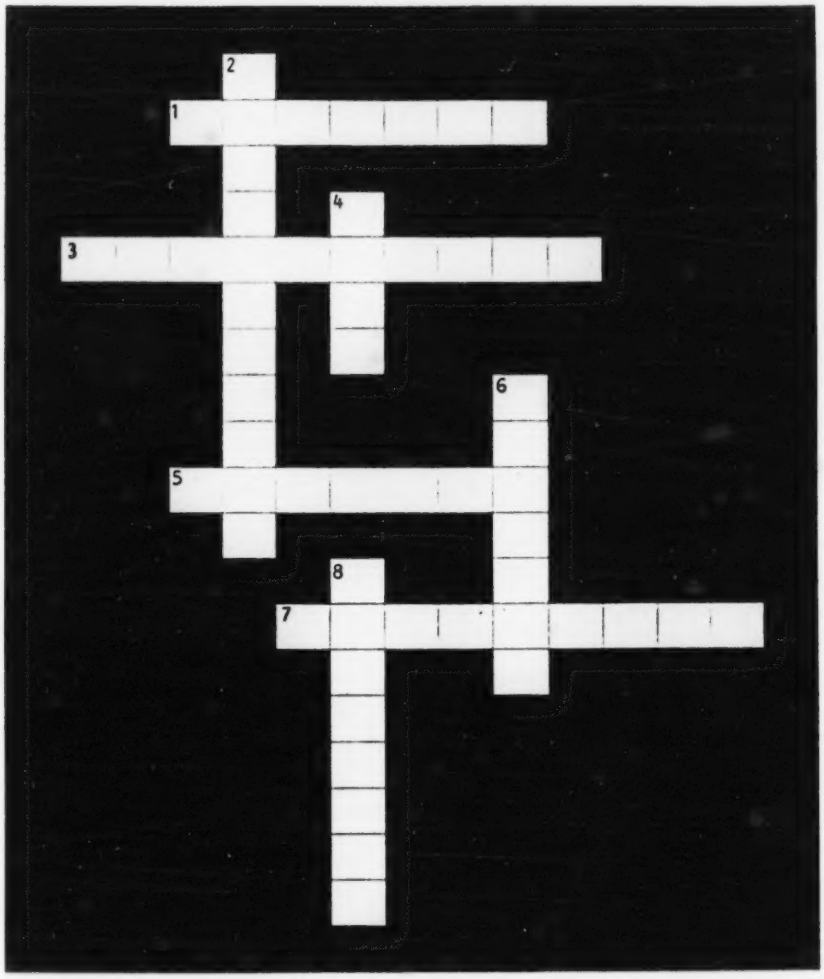
D. Just for fun

Mini-crossword puzzle: names of places mentioned in this chapter.

1. The city where May lives.
2. A province south of Bangkok, where Waht first went to work.
3. _____ Garden, the location of May's school.
4. A popular disco, where May went out with her friends.
5. A world-famous resort south of Bangkok.
6. Waht's village.
7. The region where Waht came from.
8. The village where May's family used to have a summer cottage.



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Appendix: List of Nines

In Thai tradition, nine is supposed to be the luckiest number, because the word for nine (*gao*) also means "to advance, move forward" (though spelled differently). Following this tradition, we have prepared various lists of facts, all arranged in nines.

The nine population censuses taken in modern Thailand

Year	Number of inhabitants
1911	8,266,408
1919	9,207,355
1929	11,506,207
1937	14,464,105
1947	17,442,689
1960	26,257,916
1970	34,397,374
1980	44,824,540
1990	54,532,000

Nine hobbies of King Rama IX

1. Photography: many of the most loved portraits of the royal family, and especially of Queen Sirikit, were taken by the king himself. Periodically exhibitions of his photographs are held in Bangkok.

2. Painting: best known of the king's paintings is a portrait of the queen.

3. Composing music: many of the tunes heard on Thai radio and television are composed by the king. He also composed the anthems of three of Thailand's universities.

4. Sailing: in 1967, King Rama IX won the Southeast Asia Peninsula Games gold medal. He was 40 years old at the time. The king also builds some of his sailboats by himself.

5. Playing the saxophone: in his early years on the throne, when he had more free time, the king used to have jam sessions with students at Chulalongkorn University.

6. Racing: the king was an avid car racer in his youth, and took part in many competitions.

7. Engineering: the king holds an engineering degree which he earned in Switzerland. However, since he has been a ruling monarch ever since his graduation, engineering became just a hobby for the king. He most enjoys planning rural development projects.

8. Translation: in his spare time, the king likes to translate Buddhist scriptures from their original Pali.

9. Playing badminton: most Thais enjoy playing badminton, and the king is no different.

The nine most populated provinces (1990)

1. Bangkok	5,716,779
2. Nakhon Ratchasima	2,325,124
3. Ubon Ratchathani	1,862,413
4. Udon Thani	1,768,241
5. Khon Kaen	1,649,546
6. Nakhon Si Thammarat	1,396,209
7. Buri Ram	1,403,383
8. Chiang Mai	1,345,715
9. Sisaket	1,282,303

The nine kings of the Chakri Dynasty

1. Rama I	1782 - 1809
2. Rama II	1809 - 1824
3. Rama III	1824 - 1851
4. Rama IV	1851 - 1868
5. Rama V	1868 - 1910
6. Rama VI	1910 - 1925
7. Rama VII	1925 - 1935
8. Rama VIII	1935 - 1946
9. Rama IX	1946 -

The nine longest-serving prime ministers

1. Luang Phibunsongkhram	Dec. 16, 1938 - July 24, 1944
	Apr. 8, 1948 - Sept. 16, 1957
2. Thanom Kittikachorn	Jan. 1, 1958 - Oct. 20, 1958
	Dec. 9, 1963 - Oct. 14, 1973
3. Prem Tinsulanonda	Mar. 3, 1980 - Aug. 4, 1988
4. Phot Phahonyothin	June 21, 1933 - Dec. 16, 1938

5. Sarit Thanarat	Feb. 9, 1959 - Dec. 8, 1963
6. Chatichai Choonhavan	Aug. 4, 1988 - Feb. 24, 1991
7. Kriangsak Chomanand	Nov. 11, 1977 - Feb. 28, 1980
8. Anand Panyarachun	March 2, 1991 - Apr. 7, 1992
	June 10, 1992 - Sept. 23, 1992
9. Sanya Dharmasakti	Oct. 14, 1973 - Feb. 15, 1975

The nine-shortest serving prime ministers

1. Thawi Bunyaket	Aug. 31, 1945 - Sept. 17, 1945
2. Suchinda Kraprayoon	Apr. 8, 1992 - May 24, 1992
3. Phot Sarasin	Sept. 21, 1957 - Dec. 26, 1957
4. Pridi Phanomyong	Mar. 24, 1946 - Aug. 21, 1946
5. Khuang Aphaiwong	Jan. 31, 1946 - Mar. 18, 1946
	Nov. 10, 1947 - Apr. 8, 1948
6. Kot Hutasing	Aug. 28, 1932 - June 20, 1933
7. Kukrit Pramoj	Mar. 14, 1975 - Jan. 12, 1976
8. Seni Pramoj	Sept. 17, 1945 - Jan. 31, 1946
	Feb. 15, 1975 - Mar. 6, 1975
	Apr. 20, 1976 - Oct. 6, 1976
9. Thanin Kraivichien	Oct. 8, 1976 - Oct. 20, 1977

The *Sakdi Na* system

Position or rank	**Symbolic *rais* of rice fields**
1. King	infinite
2. Viceroy	100,000
3. High-ranking princes	40,000 - 50,000
4. Low-ranking princes	15,000 - 20,000
5. Other members of the royal family	500 - 11,000
6. Ministers	5,000 - 10,000
7. Government employees	50 - 3,000
8. Workers and farmers	10 - 30
9. Beggars and slaves	5

The nine most popular sports in Thailand (1987)

Type of activity	**Number of participants**
1. Soccer	3,312,430
2. Gymnastics	1,368,620
3. Volleyball	1,018,720

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4. Athletics	993,090
5. Jogging	734,900
6. kick *takraw*	705,120
7. badminton	368,570
8. basketball	310,070
9. hand *takraw*	193,470

Source: National Statistics Office
(Note: a *takraw* is a ball made of wicker)

The nine most frequently reported crimes (1989)

Type of criminal act	Number of reports
1. Gambling	84,960
2. Drug offenses	68,647
3. Theft	37,840
4. Weapons offenses	18,145
5. Assault and battery	16,689
6. Robbery	13,022
7. Sex offenses	5,763
8. Murder	5,740
9. Cattle theft & robbery	683

Source: Royal Thai Police Department

The nine countries from which most visitors came to Thailand (1990)

Country	Number of arrivals
1. Malaysia	804,629
2. Japan	635,555
3. China and Taiwan	545,629
4. Britain	318,220
5. U.S.A.	291,635
6. Singapore	289,411
7. Germany	239,915
8. France	194,618
9. Korea	144,747

Source: Tourism Authority of Thailand, Office of the Prime Minister

Thailand's nine principal mountains

1. Doi Inthanon	2,576 m (8,449 ft)
2. Doi Pha Hom Pok	2,297 m (7,534 ft)
3. Doi Luang	2,195 m (7,200 ft)
4. Doi Suthep	2,185 m (7,167 ft)
5. Doi Pha Cho	2,024 m (6,639 ft)
6. Doi Mae Ang Khang	1,940 m (6,363 ft)
7. Doi Lon	1,897 m (6,222 ft)
8. Khao Luang	1,784 m (5,852 ft)
9. Doi Mae Kon	1,778 m (5,832 ft)

Thailand's nine principal rivers

1. Mekong	950 km (590 miles) [portion in or bordering Thailand]
2. Mun	673 km (418 miles)
3. Nan	627 km (389 miles)
4. Ping	590 km (366 miles)
5. Yom	555 km (345 miles)
6. Pasak	513 km (319 miles)
7. Chi	442 km (275 miles)
8. Chao Phrya	365 km (227 miles)
9. Wang	335 km (208 miles)

Nine important archeological sites

1. Ban Chiang (oldest site in Thailand)
2. Phanom Rung (mountaintop Khmer castle)
3. Phimai (Khmer temple compound)
4. Sukhothai (first Thai capital)
5. Ayutthaya (Thai capital sacked by the Burmese)
6. Lopburi (palace of King Narai and Faulkon)
7. Prasat Muang Sing (Khmer city)
8. Kamphaeng Phet (ancient city, contemporary with Sukhothai)
9. Sri Satchanalai (twin city of Sukhothai)

The nine largest provinces

1. Chiang Mai	22,993 sq.km. (8,875 sq.miles)
2. Ubon Ratchathani	22,758 sq.km. (8,785 sq.miles)
3. Nakhon Ratchasima	19,590 sq.km. (7,561 sq.miles)
4. Kanchanaburi	19,486 sq.km. (7,522 sq.miles)
5. Chiang Rai	18,804 sq.km. (7,258 sq.miles)

6. Udon Thani	16,605 sq.km. (6,410 sq.miles)
7. Tak	15,609 sq.km. (6,025 sq.miles)
8. Mae Hong Son	14,244 sq.km. (5,498 sq.miles)
9. Lampang	13,815 sq.km. (5,333 sq.miles)

Nine spectacular sights in Bangkok

1. The Grand Palace
2. The Temple of the Emerald Buddha
3. The King Rama IX Bridge
4. The Marble Temple
5. The Reclining Buddha of Wat Po
6. The Floating Market
7. The Solid Gold Buddha of Wat Traimit
8. The giant Standing Buddha of Wat Intharawihan
9. The Royal Barges at the Navy Boathouse

The nine other countries (except for Thailand) in Southeast Asia

1. Indonesia
2. Malaysia
3. Brunei
4. Singapore
5. Philippines
6. Burma
7. Cambodia
8. Laos
9. Vietnam

Nine important years in Thai history (in previous centuries)

1. 1257	Founding of Sukhothai
2. 1351	Founding of Ayutthaya
3. 1431	Conquest of Angkor Wat by Thai forces
4. 1593	Elephant-back duel between Naresuan and the Burmese crown prince
5. 1688	Revolution in Ayutthaya
5. 1767	Burmese sack Ayutthaya
6. 1782	Foundation of the Chakri dynasty
7. 1868	Rama V becomes king
8. 1892	Government reform
9. 1893	France extorts territorial concessions

Nine important dates in Thai history (20th century)

1. 1910 Rama V dies
2. 1918 Thailand enters World War I
3. 1932 Promulgation of the Constitution
4. 1935 King Rama VII abdicates
5. 1941 Thailand overrun by Japan
6. 1951 Coronation of King Rama IX
7. 1973 Student-lead revolution
8. 1976 Reimposition of dictatorship
9. 1992 Bloody May and reintroduction of democracy

The Nine Auspicious Jewels (used in traditional Thai jewelry)

1. Diamond
2. Ruby
3. Emerald
4. Garnet
5. Opal
6. Topaz
7. Cat's eye
8. Zircon
9. Onyx

Nine things never to do when you are in Thailand

1. Pointing with your foot. The foot is considered to be the lowliest and dirtiest part of the body, and is to be used only for walking (and, sometimes, kicking a *takraw*).

2. Touching someone's head. The head is the most respected part of the body, and the abode of the *khwan* or guardian spirit.

3. Raising your voice. It is considered to be the ultimate sign of bad manners and will achieve no result.

4. Kissing or hugging in public. Thais avoid public display of affection.

5. Stepping on a threshold. It is where the door spirit resides, and he might be offended.

6. Criticizing someone directly. Thais will accept criticism only if it disguised in a compliment, for example: "it's so nice that you've shown up to work on time today!" (Implying that person is usually late.)

7. Getting off a bus without looking to your left. Motorcyclists like to drive at enormous speeds between the curb and the cars and buses along it.

8. Saying anything uncomplimentary about a member of the royal family. Thais will take it as a personal insult, and you might end up in jail, too. *Lèse majesté* (speaking disrespectfully about members of the royal family) is a felony in Thailand.

9. Splitting the check when going out with Thai friends. When going out, the oldest person is expected to pay. If everyone is of the same age, someone will inconspicuously pick up the tab, expecting to be treated on another occasion. Splitting the check or 'going Dutch' is considered to be a sign of stinginess, one of the most despised qualities in Thailand.)

Nine useful Thai expressions (spelled to look like English)

1. So what dee (Hello)
2. Kop koon (Thank you)
3. Car tote (Excuse me)
4. My pen rye (Never mind)
5. Sanook (fun)
6. Aroy (delicious)
7. Sabye (pleasant, comfortable)
8. Pie nie (what's up?)
9. Chop mark (I really like it)

Nine exotic Thai delicacies

1. Water beetle dip
2. Roasted dragonflies
3. Worms boiled in coconut milk
4. Jellied shredded pig's ears
5. Fish stomach salad
6. Deep-fried chicks (eyes, beaks, and all)
7. Innard soup with curdled pig's blood
8. Turtle egg curry
9. Fermented fish

The nine most important sectors in the national economy (1990)

1. Manufacturing	24.7%
2. Trade	17.6%

3. Agriculture	14.4%
4. Misc. services	12.3%
5. Transportation and Communication	7.1%
6. Banking, insurance, and real estate	5.3%
7. Construction	5.2%
8. Public administration and defense	3.8%
9. Ownership of dwellings	3.6%

Nine things you can get for under one US dollar in Thailand

1. twelve bus rides
2. 50 pieces of fried banana
3. a hand-painted porcelain vase
4. 12 lbs of papaya
5. lunch for two at a noodle stand
6. a pair of handmade hill tribe earrings
7. five pairs of children's shorts
8. 25 ferry boat rides across the Chao Phraya river
9. three decorated bamboo flutes

The nine largest items in the national budget (1991)

Item	Percent of budget
1. Education	19.3%
2. Defense	17.7%
3. Repayment of loans	15.1%
4. General Services	12.2%
5. Agricultural projects	9.5%
6. Social services	7.1%
7. Transportation and Communication	6.9%
8. Public Health	5.8%
9. Internal security	4.4%

Source: Bureau of the Budget, Office of the Prime Minister
Note: the total national budget for 1991 was 387.5 billion baht, or about $15.5 billion.

The nine largest exporters to Thailand (1990)

Country	Amount exported
1. Japan	$10.21 billion
2. U.S.A.	$ 3.62 billion

3. Singapore	$ 2.50 billion
4. Taiwan	$ 1.74 billion
5. Germany	$ 1.62 billion
6. Malaysia	$ 1.13 billion
7. China	$ 1.11 billion
8. Korea	$ 1.05 billion
9. Britain	$ .79 billion

Source: the Customs Department, Ministry of Finance

The nine largest importers from Thailand (1990)

Country	Amount imported
1. U.S.A.	$ 5.26 billion
2. Japan	$ 3.99 billion
3. Singapore	$ 1.71 billion
4. Germany	$ 1.20 billion
5. Netherlands	$ 1.12 billion
6. Hong Kong	$ 1.04 billion
7. Britain	$ .94 billion
8. Malaysia	$ .58 billion
9. France	$ .57 billion

Source: the Customs Department, Ministry of Finance

The nine most important exports (1989)

Commodity	Value
1. Clothes	$2.28 billion
2. Rice	$1.79 billion
3. Jewels and jewelry	$1.14 billion
4. Rubber	$1.04 billion
5. Tapioca products	$ .94 billion
6. Canned seafood	$ .82 billion
7. Sugar	$ .76 billion
8. Frozen prawns	$ .63 billion
9. Shoes	$ .53 billion

Source: the Customs Department, Ministry of Finance

The nine largest crops (by weight, 1989/90)

Crop	Production (in tons)
1. Sugarcane	33,561
2. Cassava	20,701
3. Rice	20,177
4. Maize (corn)	4,393
5. Coconuts	1,437
6. Oil palm fruit	1,098
7. Rubber	936
8. Soybeans	672
9. Mung beans	356

Source: Office of Agricultural Economics, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives

The nine principal farm and domesticated animals (1989)

Animal	Number
1. Chickens	88,405,000
2. Ducks	(Number unavailable)
3. Water buffaloes	5,445,000
4. Cattle	5,283,000
5. Pigs	4,679,000
6. Geese	472,000
7. Sheep	155,898
8. Goats	108,218
9. Horses	18,097

Source: Office of Agriculture Economics, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives.

Nine most important minerals mined in Thailand (1990)

Mineral	Tons mined
1. Limestone	19,520,720
2. Lignite	12,421,138
3. Gypsum	5,753,351
4. Shale	2,685,570
5. Glass sand	421,508
6. Marl	366,879
7. Kaolin	208,029

8. Iron ore	128,626
9. Barite	107,707

Source: Department of Mineral Resources, Ministry of Industry

Nine things no Thai home is without

1. Rice
2. Buddha images (or other religious objects for non-Buddhists)
3. Fish sauce
4. Portrait of the king
5. Coca cola
6. Silk
7. Radio
8. Books and/or magazines
9. Traditional Thai medicine

Nine everyday activities in Bangkok

1. Snacking
2. Shopping
3. Being stuck in traffic jams
4. Reading grisly news stories
5. Watching Chinese soap operas
6. Talking about food
7. Listening to Thai imitations of Western rock music
8. Expressing love and admiration for the king
9. Napping (any time, any place)

Nine places Bangkok teenagers like to go to for a snack

1. McDonald's
2. Burger King
3. Pizza Hut
4. Kentucky Fried Chicken
5. Baskin-Robbins
6. Dunkin' Donuts
7. Swensen's Ice Cream
8. Mrs. Field's Cookies
9. A & W

Nine things Thais make out of coconuts

1. Coconut juice: the clear liquid inside the young fruit is a thirst-quenching delight on a hot tropical day.

2. Coconut milk: made by grating older fruit and squeezing the pulp with water. Used in cooking various dishes, including the famous Thai curries and many kinds of desserts.

3. Oil: rendered by simmering the pulp of aged coconuts over low heat. Used for cooking and frying.

4. Kitchen utensils: pieces of polished coconut shell are attached to wooden handles, and serve as teaspoons, tablespoons, and ladles.

5. Jewelry: made of polished and engraved pieces of coconut shell and sterling silver.

6. Rope: made of the thick fiber between the outer and inner shells.

7. Ice cream: a tasty treat, usually served topped with ground peanuts.

8. Cups and bowls: made of halves of coconut shells.

9. Toys: made of entire coconut shells, out of the which the pulp has been carefully removed. The shell has natural "eyes", and when ears are attached the toy looks like a rabbit.

Answers to Selected Student Exercises

Unit 1

B

1. see page 1
2. seasonally low temperatures
3. see page 2, third and fourth paragraphs
4. see page 2, sixth paragraph
5. see page 2, last paragraph
6. see page 3, second paragraph
7. A majority of the most important agricultural export, rice crop, is grown here.
8. see page 3, last two paragraphs
9. see page 4, third paragraph
10. see page 5, fourth paragraph
11. see page 5, second paragraph
12. see page 5, last paragraph
13. The tallest building on temple grounds.
14. When the temple was built, it was still forbidden for any males who were not members of the royal family to reside within the royal compound.
15. see page 7, second paragraph
16. see page 8, second paragraph
17. see page 9, first paragraph
18. see page 10, last three paragraphs
19. see page 11, last paragraph, and page 12, second paragraph
20. see page 11, third and fourth paragraphs
21. see page 12, last paragraph
22. see page 14, in box

Unit 2

B.

1. A sustained high birth rate along with a sharp drop in infant mortality.
2. Central Thais, northern Thais, northeastern Thais, and southern Thais.
3. see page 19, last paragraph
4. Cash crops primarily, and in the past, timber.
5. Rubber plantations, tin mines, and sea-related occupations.
6. see page 21, last paragraph, and page 22, first two paragraphs
7. Central Thai, the northeastern dialect, Isan, southern Thai, and northern Thai.
8. Thai is a tonal language.
9. see page 24, first paragraph
10. A special vocabulary used to describe anything pertaining to the king and his family.
11. see page 26, first paragraph
12. see page 26, second and third paragraphs
13. see page 26, last paragraph
14. see page 27, second through fifth paragraphs
15. see page 28, second and third paragraphs
16. see page 28, fifth and sixth paragraphs, and page 29, first paragraph
17. Those who fled religious and political persecution, those who fled from French occupation in the 1880's, and those who fled from the French and Communists following WWII.
18. see page 30, fourth paragraph

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Unit 3

B

1. see pages 35-36
2. see page 37, second paragraph
3. The Khmer kings left behind extensive inscriptions on the history of the empire.
4. see page 38, first paragraph, and page 39, last paragraph
5. see page 38, last paragraph, and page 39, first three paragraphs
6. see page 40, second paragraph
7. Tai refers to all the groups while Thai only refers to those living in Thailand.
8. Burma, Laos, India, and Vietnam.
9. see page 41, third paragraph
10. see page 42, last paragraph, and page 43, first two paragraphs
11. see page 42, excerpt
12. see page 44, first paragraph

Unit 4

B.

1. Nay Saen Pom was a gardener who got his name from the ugly blotches that covered his body.
2. see page 48, first and second paragraphs
3. see page 49, first paragraph
4. see page 49, second paragraph
5. see page 49, fourth paragraph
6. see page 50, second and third paragraphs
7. see page 50, fifth paragraph
8. see page 51, second through fifth paragraphs
9. see page 51, last paragraph
10. see page 52, first paragraph
11. A form of labor which is similar to slavery.
12. The Khmer, Sukhothai, Lan Na, and the Burmese, who were the most tenacious.
13. see pages 54-55

D.

1. rice
2. Angkor
3. muang
4. Ayutthaya
5. Trailok
6. hides
7. Indra
8. Burma
9. oo
10. Dutch
11. island

Unit 5

B.

1. see page 59, second paragraph
2. Tak Sin was tied inside a velvet sack and beaten to death with sandalwood clubs because it was forbidden to touch royalty.

3. see page 60, second paragraph
4. see page 60, last paragraph
5. see page 61, second paragraph
6. see page 62, first paragraph
7. see page 62, second paragraph
8. see pages 62-63
9. see page 63, fourth paragraph
10. see page 64, last paragraph
11. see page 65, first paragraph
12. see page 65
13. see page 65, last paragraph
14. He was a monk at a distant a monastery.
15. see page 67, second and third paragraphs
16. see page 67, second paragraph
17. see page 67, in box
18. see page 68, third and fourth paragraphs
19. see page 69, second and third paragraphs
20. see page 69, second box
21. see page 69, second paragraph, and page 70, third paragraph
22. see pages 70-71
23. see page 71, last paragraph

Unit 6

B.
1. see page 75, first paragraph
2. see page 75, third paragraph
3. see page 75, last paragraph
4. see page 76, second paragraph
5. see pages 75-76
6. see page 77, second paragraph
7. see pages 77-78
8. see page 79, second paragraph
9. see page 79, sixth paragraph
10. see page 79, last paragraph
11. see pages 80-82
12. see pages 80-81

Unit 7

B.
1. see page 86, first paragraph
2. see page 86, fourth paragraph
3. see page 87, last paragraph
4. see page 88, first through third paragraphs
5. see page 88, fifth and sixth paragraphs
6. see page 88, fourth paragraph
7. see page 89, first and second paragraphs
8. see page 90, second paragraph
9. see page 90, third and fourth paragraphs
10. see page 91, first paragraph
11. see pages 91-92
12. see page 92, fourth paragraph
13. see page 93, second and third paragraphs
14. see pages 93 and 95

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15. see pages 94-95
16. see pages 95-96
17. see page 96, second and third paragraphs
18. see pages 96-97

Unit 8

B

1. see page 100, first paragraph
2. An umbrella organization of artists' guilds that enjoys royal patronage.
3. see pages 100-101
4. see pages 101-102
5. see page 102, second paragraph
6. see page 102, third paragraph
7. see pages 102-104
8. see pages 104-105
9. see page 106
10. see page 106, fourth paragraph
11. see page 106, last paragraph
12. The Ban Chiang civilization preceded the arrival of the Thais.
13. see page 107, last paragraph
14. see page 108, third through fifth paragraphs
15. Wood is a very vulnerable material, so many older woodcarvings are badly damaged from being exposed to the elements.
16. They are covered with glass mosaics and gold.
17. see page 110

D.

nielloware
painting
architecture
woodcarving
glass mosaics
textiles
ceramics
lacquerware

Unit 9

B.

1. see pages 115-116
2. The Ramakian was written entirely in Thai style and verse form.
3. The Jataka stories are stories composed about Buddha's previous lives before he became enlightened
4. see pages 117-118
5. The main characters of Khun Chang Khun Phaen are Khun Chang, Khun Phaen , and Wan Thong, who were all playmates as children.
6. see page 119, third paragraph
7. see page 119, last paragraph
8. "The father of Thai literature" is said to be King Rama IX, who wrote plays tragedies, and comedies.
9. see page 121, third and fourth paragraphs
10. see page 122, third paragraph
11. see pages 123-124

12. The ancient Thai calendar was lunar
13. The Thais get their system of 12-year cycles from the Chinese, and each year is identified by the animal it is associated with.
14. see page 129, last paragraph
15. A takraw, ball woven out of wicker.
16. Other parts of the body, such as knees, head, shoulders, elbows, and feet are allowed.
17. Kaosai Galaxy and Arkom Changlai are boxers who have won several world championships and Olympic medals in Western-style boxing.
18. see page 131, last paragraph

Unit 10

B.

1. Animism refers to the religious belief in spirits which have the power to intervene in human lives.
2. The Khwan enters the body through the crown of the head during a special ceremony to invite it.
3. A top knot is a bunch of hair at the top of an otherwise shaven head.
4. The Thais adopted Buddhism from the Mon when they moved into what is present day Thailand.
5. The major sects of Buddhism are Theravada Buddhism, which is practiced in Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Burma, and Mahayana Buddhism, which is practiced in China, Mongolia, Japan, and Korea.
6. see page 137, second paragraph
7. see page 138, second through fifth paragraphs
8. Dukka signifies all that is negative in life: pain, suffering, sadness, longing, and unhappiness.
9. Thais make merit by doing good deeds towards other people, and doing religious good deeds.
10. see pages 141-142
11. see pages 143-144
12. The largest Muslim group in Thailand are the inhabitants of southern Thailand, who were introduced to Islam by Malay converts of Arab and Persian merchants.
13. see page 146, first paragraph
14. see pages 146-147

D.

1. Theravada
2. cause and effect
3. five precepts
4. moderation
5. Khwan
6. top knot
7. Siddhartha
8. Muslim-Malays
9. missionaries
10. temple

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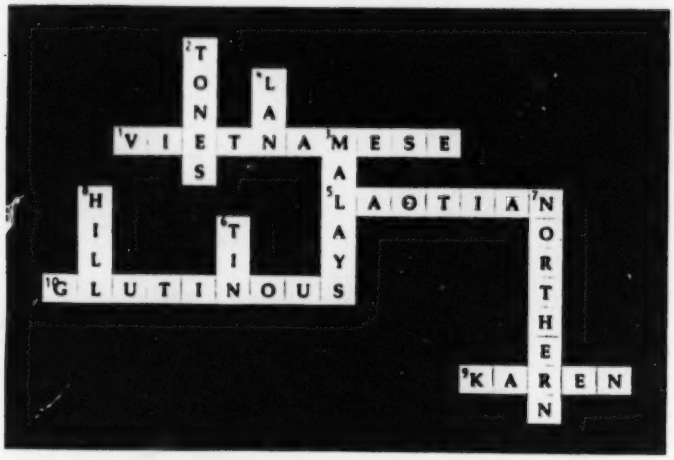
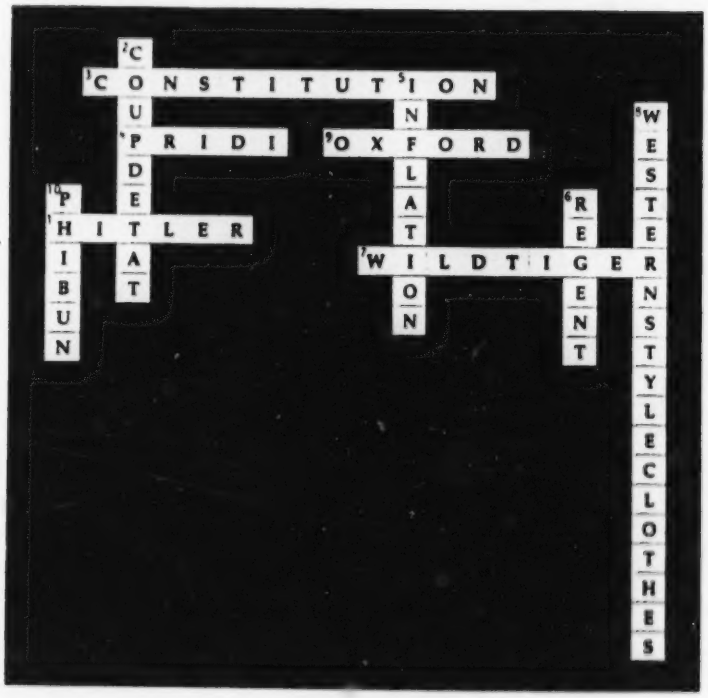
Answers to the Crossword Puzzles

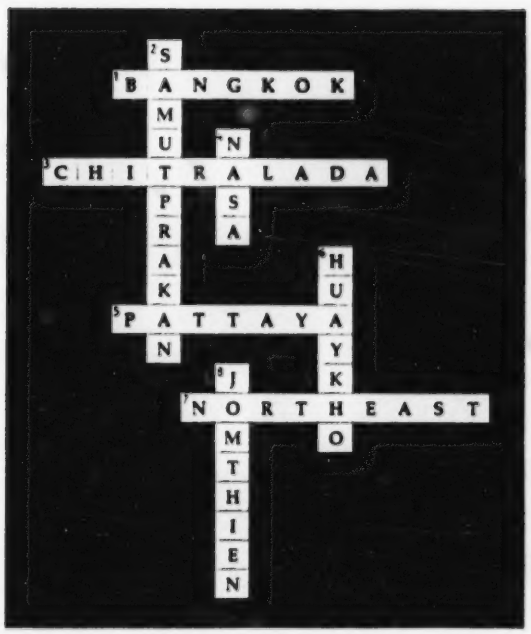
Unit 2: page 37



Unit 6: page 92



Unit 13: page 223



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